

## ‘OBJECTS OF LOVING ATTENTION’: ANTIQUARIAN VIEWS OF FOLKESTONE. PART ONE

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*The land itself and the evidence it bore became objects of loving attention*<sup>1</sup>

In March 2010 a project called ‘A Town Unearthed: Folkestone Before 1500’ (ATU), began to re-visit the archaeology and early history of Folkestone, involving a wide range local people in the experience of excavation, post excavation and contextual research. One straightforward aim of the project was to use community supported archaeology and research to fill in some substantial gaps in knowledge about the history of the town and its environs, engaging people and sharing findings through educational activities and events. Of central concern was the fate of the Roman villa site at the East Cliff. Excavated in 1924 by S.E. Winbolt, and later by Brian Philp and others, the site is now in a critical condition due to the relentless erosion of the cliff on which it sits. It was a priority for the project to re-visit this site and to look at previously unexcavated areas in order to find out more and answer public questions about the villa and its history. Other sites included the Bayle, associated with the early Anglo-Saxon minster of St Eanswythe and a later Norman Priory and Castle Hill, a huge Norman defensive earthwork situated on the main road out of the town (**Fig. 1**). All of these sites were poorly understood and where work had been undertaken it had not been co-ordinated into a coherent account.

One thing that was striking for those involved in the project but new to the town was the extent to which, despite an unusually rich and varied ancient heritage, Folkestone appeared to be an overwhelmingly Victorian or Edwardian place with a public history that was concentrated within quite modern events: the town as a successful health resort, visited by Royalty and the rich or more recently the role of the town as a port in the Great War. One problem perhaps in such parameters was that they offered a rather limited scope for understanding the place of Folkestone and how it is situated within the much wider frameworks of historical change over

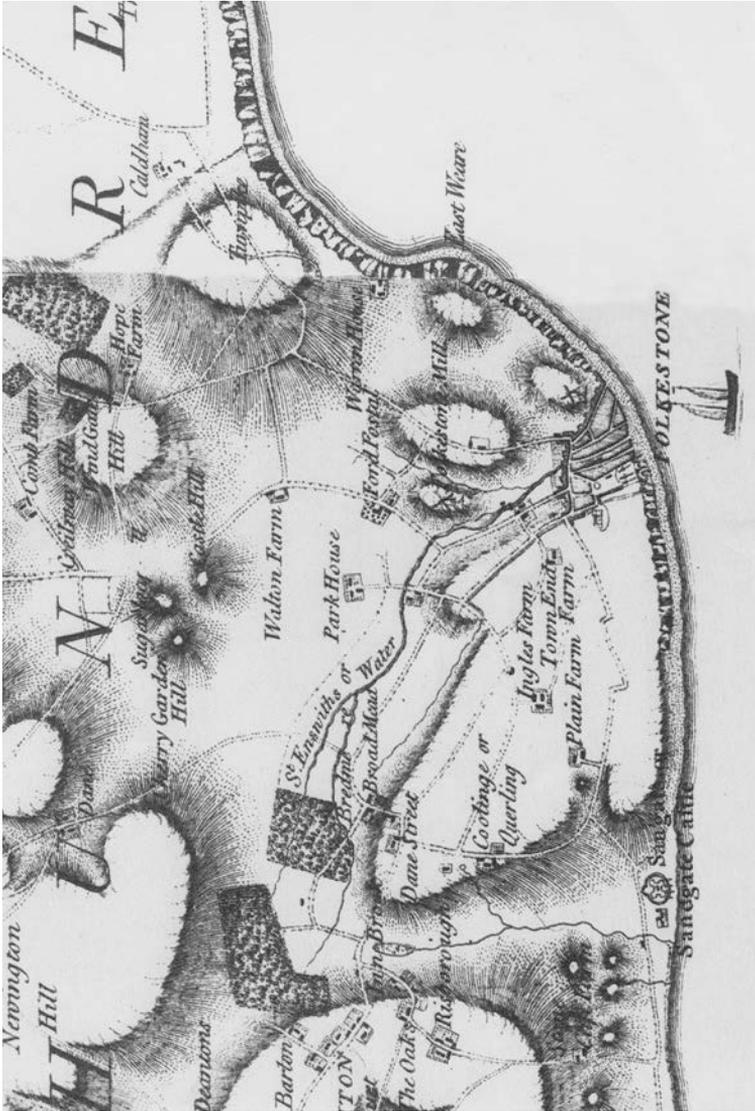


Fig. 1 Folkestone and environs; extract from Andrews, Dury and Herbert map, 1769.

the last few millennia; another is that they inevitably accentuate a sense of decline from the most recent position of affluence.

Part of the project then was to enrich existing histories of the town, to highlight the significance and diversity of Folkestone and its history: to get under the skin of the identity of the town in order to challenge and broaden perceptions of it. In order to do this the project established a Research Group, a mixture of professional archaeologists and historians working alongside other local people, and began a programme of research into the archives, records and collections of the town and into the biographies and writings of those who had written about Folkestone. Our aim was to 'unearth' not the archaeology but rather the story of how that archaeology had been discovered, reported and received; how had it formed the history of Folkestone? More broadly we were seeking to understand what were the cultural, social and political factors that determine how archaeology and history in one place is understood, discovered and indeed forgotten?

The continuity of recorded antiquarian and archaeological interest in Folkestone we knew dated back to at least the seventeenth century and so there was a real possibility of looking at such processes over time and as work progressed a number of fascinating stories emerged: notably that of 'Roman Folkestone' and the background to Winbolt's 1924 excavation, the national and international attention it generated and its role in the establishment of a national appetite for archaeology in the aftermath of the First World War.

Research is continuing and emerging from it are the roles played by others in the formation of the rich historiography of the town: antiquarian topographers such as Philipot, Victorian antiquaries and naturalists such as Samuel Joseph Mackie, Thomas Wright, Roach Smith and the writers Arthur Weigall and Rosemary Sutcliffe to name a few.<sup>2</sup> Through the lens of their work in Folkestone we have gained a much better understanding of the place of the ancient past in our culture and how that has changed over time: the context of how and why sites and objects were discovered; the impact of the changing economies and cultures; the part played by rapid development in both the destruction and discovery of archaeology and the importance of local politics to heritage.

There were changes and shifts in such processes but also as we have seen, important continuities and these went back surprisingly far, repeating themes, associations and oppositions which are traceable over hundreds of years of accounts and histories. One such recurring theme was that of the town's fall from earlier significance. Interestingly, one of the results of our research was to establish that such perspectives appear again and again in earlier accounts from the sixteenth century until the nineteenth, stressing, as Camden (1555-1623), noted, Folkestone had been a 'flourishing place in times past',<sup>3</sup> but was now diminished, its historical buildings eroded and ruined by the remorseless action of the sea.

Richard Hingley in his study of the attitude of Victorian archaeologists to Rome and its influence on British history has made use of Raphael Samuel's phrase 'mythical thought' to describe such deep structures and dynamics of purpose and meaning that can run through even the most cautiously empirical work.<sup>4</sup> It is then these compelling features that this article will begin to address but with the added focus of a particular place: the aim is to look at the underlying tendencies of antiquarianism and how they operate in Folkestone.

The study of early antiquarianism was an obvious place to start our search for the construction of the town's identity. This article is a beginning to that process, looking at antiquarian or other accounts from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. Part Two will consider the following centuries to the present. There will be many readers who will be able to add to this preliminary discussion of the historiography of Folkestone and beyond. This and other aspects of 'A Town Unearthed' should be seen in the context of the recent renewal of interest in Public History and Public Archaeology. By setting out a few of the underlying themes that recur within Folkestone's history some questions can be posed about the traditions, culture and politics that inform our understanding of the past.

### The Character of Antiquarianism

*'No historical problem should be studied without studying... the history of historical thought about it'.<sup>5</sup>*

Antiquarianism emerged from a medieval attitude to the past which showed very little systematic interest in dating or the study of material remains and which had not yet developed a clear distinction between mythology and history. It was not on the whole until the Renaissance that such views began to be challenged by Polydore Vergil and others<sup>6</sup> and in England this came later than it did on the continent. One imperative for such changes came from the increasing interest in and availability of ancient manuscripts, the teaching of Greek and the foundations of schools and universities. Another came from the need to establish a more viable lineage for the English crown and the desire to find documentary precedent for important aspects of political and religious power. Precedent, the principle of establishing the priority of something: law, ownership of land, kingship by demonstrating its roots in time was a pervasive way of thinking in early modern society but it required a framework or chronology to be convincing. The need to provide a framework of authenticity for such precedent was one motive for early antiquarian work and along with this came the need to map the country so that events that appeared within earlier sources could be located. These trends were spurred on by the English Reformation and given a further boost by the

death of Queen Mary and the accession of protestant Princess Elizabeth. After this, as John Burrow has noted, there was an injection of patriotic enthusiasm for the history and identity of the country: 'a sort of love affair with England and Englishness in which sixteenth-century English histories and chronicles played a notable part'. The antiquarian histories, surveys and perambulations of the time were one aspect of this.

Although by the time of Elizabeth the intellectual climate made such studies more possible there were serious limits to what antiquarians could achieve. Access to texts was limited; there were few large repositories of such sources available outside of London and although many of the more famous antiquaries of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had lived in Oxford, London or abroad in centres such as Paris they were often writing at a distance from their primary sources and remained very dependent on each other for support. The propensity for antiquarians to depend on extended networks of communication, involving friendship, visits, exchanges of drafts and letter was established in this period. A Society of Antiquaries, formed mostly from associates of the antiquarian William Camden (1551-1623), met between 1586 and 1607 but it would be a hundred years later that the 'Society of Antiquaries of London' was formed to give a meeting place and support to antiquarian scholarship.

We can see something of this habit of repetition and mutual dependence in one early account of Folkestone when William Lambarde (1536-1601) in his 1570 'Perambulation of Kent' typically cites the enquiries of his friend William Camden and Camden's source the sixth-century monk Gildas: 'Maister Camden gathereth out of Gyldas, that Folkestone should aunciently stande on of those Turrets which the Romanes planted ....'<sup>7</sup> These structures of exchange and affirmation increased the tendencies to repeat and rely on the findings of other antiquaries and, as we shall see in the case of Folkestone, the exchanges of ideas could create a confusion from which only a few simple and unqualified ideas could emerge and persist.

Early modern society gave primacy to the text and the older the better. The writings of Roman and Greek authors which represented the legitimacy of the classical world were therefore an important source. Although more and more texts were being translated and put into circulation there was a relatively small amount of primary material to draw on and often its scope and value was reduced by an original purpose or location. As Virginia Hoselitz has pointed out in her survey of Victorian antiquaries<sup>8</sup> such sources were fundamentally limited because so few extant classical texts referred to Roman Britain and where they do their references were brief and hard to substantiate.

Classical sources brought their own particular bias. The Renaissance scholarship of the continent produced and preserved versions of three texts which would be very significant to the character of British antiquarianism:

the *Antonine Itinerary*, translated c.1512, is a third century ‘road book’ which gives the names of towns and posting stations along Roman roads; the *Notitia Dignitatum*, preserved in a fifteenth-century copy in Oxford, was a fifth-century list of senior Roman military and civil posts ‘prepared, as will be seen, by the ‘chief of the notaries’ in the East and West respectively’;<sup>9</sup> the third source of importance was the Geography of Ptolemy, translated in 1512, this offered a list of place names, rivers and people known across the world. Given that, as we have seen, references to Roman Britain were so scarce in ancient texts the specificity of such sources was a goldmine for early British antiquarians. As Francis Haverfield saw in his evaluation of the origins of Romano-British studies: ‘such lists as those of Ptolemy therefore assume an even greater importance for Britain than for other lands. Their influence upon Romano-British research has been enormous’.

Texts such as the *Notitia* and Ptolemy’s *Geography* gave a particular edge and reason to early antiquarian projects. For antiquarians such as Leland (c.1503-1552) and Camden the point was to explore the landscapes of the country and to match the features that they found there with extant classical and early sources, combined with whatever local information could be picked up and where possible with the evidence of their own eyes. In so doing they were establishing a geographical and historical map which could form the foundations of a valid history. In part this was about strengthening and legitimising the realm; as Leland puts it in his ‘address’ his purpose, ‘totally inflamed’ by his study of ancient authors, was to see for himself those parts of the realm that he had read about but also to re-establish such histories, to remedy the lack of knowledge of his own times and to re-connect the map of Britain with the ‘ancient names of havens, rivers, promontories, hills, woods, cities, towns, castles, and the variety of kin[d]reds of people...’ that the classical authors refer to: ‘so to open this window that the light be seen so long, that is to say by the whole thousand years, stopped up, and the glory of your renowned Britain to reflourish through the world’.<sup>10</sup> It was also an act of rescue. Leland poignantly describes his determination that the ancient and mediaeval texts he has read will not be lost, in Lucy Toulmin’s 1907 version ‘obscured or to have been lightly remembered as uncertain shadows’. Leland died without completing this task and never published or completed this work but for Camden, who had access to Leland’s unpublished papers and in many ways took his work forward, the purpose was similar but with a wider purpose, the salvage of Britain and its place within history. As he writes in his Preface to the 1607 edition of his great antiquarian and topographical survey *Britannia*:

For that which I chiefly propos’d to myself, was to search for and illustrate those Places, which Cæsar, Tacitus, Ptolemy, Antoninus Augustus,

Provinciarum Notitia, and other ancient Writers, have recorded; the names whereof Time has either utterly extinguish'd, or chang'd, or corrupted.<sup>11</sup>

Alongside such classical authors the chronicles and polemics of late antiquity, after the departure of the legions, were also scrutinised for the threads of meaning and chronology by which a narrative could be constructed. Foremost amongst these are the 'De Excido' a mid sixth-century text attributed to the monk Gildas, the *Historia Britonnum* an eighth- or ninth-century account by 'Nennius'<sup>12</sup> and the works of Bede and these are used again and again as near contemporary sources of information about earlier Roman and transitional Britain.

Camden's description indicates Folkestone fits very well into the category of the nearly 'extinguished' or 'corrupted'. Folkestone was a place which had had featured in Roman Britain in some way 'as may appear by the peeces of Romane coine and Britaine bricke daily there found, but under what name, it is uncertain.<sup>13</sup>

Despite evidence of its former significance Folkestone was not straightforwardly identifiable from extant Roman or other early texts, its name uncertain, and it thus invited speculation and scholarship that could fill the gaps. This practice, which John Burrows has called 'literary archaeology',<sup>14</sup> was motivated by a desire to translate the national story of England or Britain into that of the classical world. What mattered to Camden was to situate Britain within the matrix of classical history and the civilisation which followed on from it, 'as a member of the fellowship of nations'.<sup>15</sup>

Thus the early historical topography of Britain reflected underlying assumptions and anxieties about loss, identity and orientation in both a geographical and historical sense. Forms of such concerns can sometimes be detected, buried, within the features and history that were selected for description. One of these is essentially about boundaries and frontiers. How was what was British (British rather than English in relation to pre-Anglo Saxon history) defined and distinguished from what was not? What were the features that needed to be noticed and how did they fit within the narrative of British history? One aspect of this was the matter of Britain's defence. Battle sites, defensive earthworks, castles and the graves, real or imagined, of those killed in conflict were located and discussed by antiquarians. As Piggott suggests, earthwork boundaries and enclosures were a familiar part of the Tudor landscape and for those antiquarians working after the 1640s when 'Civil war earthworks still stood new and raw in the countryside' they were familiar in a military context too<sup>16</sup> and in both cases identification and differentiation between old and recent must have been a more straightforward process than perhaps it is today. This difference in perspective and knowledge between then and

now is worth recalling when we encounter the writings of antiquarians as they muse on the meanings and origins of Castle Hill in Folkestone, identify medieval cemeteries as the burial site of Saxons killed in battle or reiterate an association with Roman defensive structures along the coast. Such accounts were not simply noting features in the landscape but, as Hingley<sup>17</sup> and others have observed, tapping into the importance of frontiers that, in their perspective of Britain and its early history, often defined the boundary between Romano-British civilisation and barbarism. Related to this then is the issue of identity and origins, written about extensively in relation to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the role of antiquarian and archaeological scholarship within the emergent ideas of a British empire by Hingley, Smiles, Vance and others.<sup>18</sup> Less is written on the earlier period although Kendrick, Piggott and most recently Cunliffe have all considered earlier ideas of myths of origin and the ways that they have been passed on.

Finally, the collection of stories and accounts about historical sites and discoveries was also important to early antiquarians and the use of local recollections and myths is in some ways used as an extension of other historical sources. Such stories when encountered suggest that such 'evidence' was valued and considered worthy of collection; it represented how the land was seen and understood in a way that an objective survey could not. Recorded accounts of this sort were often indirectly gleaned from fellow antiquarians, or repeated from other sources which also reminds us that directly or indirectly much of the early antiquarian writing was based on a journey which involved real travel and real engagement with the landscape, its history and its people: 'Through dangerous Fords, o're ways unbeaten too the Searchers after Truth are bound to go'.<sup>19</sup>

### Early Antiquarians in Folkestone

In Antiquarian accounts Folkestone, 'Fokhestan or 'Folkston' seems to be recorded as a place of ancient historical significance quite disproportionate to its size. Although a town with a charter and Mayor, it was by the 1500s in decline and struggling against the economic implications of the silting up of its harbour.<sup>20</sup> It is notable then that although a modest place, Folkestone appears as a stopping point on an almost continuous string of antiquarian journeys whether real or virtual. Fittingly the first of these is that of John Leland whose *Itinerary* represents one of the first forms of such work in England. Leland was the first writer to call himself 'antiquarius'.<sup>21</sup> A legal scholar within the court of Henry VIII and Keeper of his libraries, Leland was given a licence by Henry to 'peruse and diligently to serche' monastery libraries as a functionary of the Reformation: a task which he seems to have found both enlightening and, as books were sold or burnt, distressing. Leland's ambition was to produce

a complete topographical account the antiquities of the realm to be called *De Antiquitate Britannica*. Leland never achieved this great ambition and his survey notes and library were eventually broken up. They were later transcribed by the antiquarian John Stow and through him made available to numerous others, becoming even before their publication in 1710 'a great 'quarry in which succeeding generations dug'.<sup>22</sup>

Leland would have visited Folkestone on his way between Dover and Hythe, coming down to the town across the East Cliff. Although his notes are notoriously patchy those on Kent, including Folkestone, are amongst the fullest, as he viewed the county as perhaps the most important in the country, 'the key [i.e. Quay] of al England'<sup>23</sup> and also one of the more accessible to a London-based scholar. Forty years after Leland, in the 1570s, Lambarde claims to have visited Folkestone and Camden includes it in his *Britannia*, written at much the same time. In the following century the Canterbury antiquarian John Somner (1598-1669) spent some time debating whether Folkestone might be 'Lapis Tituli' ('inscribed stone', see below), named by Gildas and Nennius as the site of the defeat of Saxons by the British prince Vortimer and the place of his own burial. Others associated with the town include John Twine (1505-1580) the Kentish antiquarian cited by Lambarde as believing that the Folkestone coastline was famous in Roman times for its oysters.<sup>24</sup> Here mention must be made of Thomas Philipot (d.1682) author of *Villare Cantianum or Kent Surveyed* and a native of Folkestone. Philipot's father John (d.1645) was a herald who had re-published the work of Camden and Lambarde and his work influenced the *Villare* to a large extent. Thomas published the *Villare* in 1659 in many ways ahead of his time, citing supporting documents and offering an analysis of the county which, as Felix Hull has observed goes beyond survey into history.<sup>25</sup> His work was followed by Dr John Harris (1666-1719) whose 'folly' the unfinished history of Kent nevertheless attempted a similarly serious and detailed survey and historical interpretation.<sup>26</sup>

The list continues throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This, as Rosemary Sweet has explained,<sup>27</sup> was a time when antiquarianism took on new forms. The 'age of enlightenment' and science seemed to offer the possibility that more could be learnt from the close study of ancient artefacts and antiquarians were often mocked by contemporaries who saw them as being obsessively concerned with the minute recording of objects. At the same time the idea of ruins and of remote places became attractive elements within Romantic views of landscape.<sup>28</sup> We can see this in Folkestone in the account of William Stukeley (1687-1765), a founder member of the re-established Society of Antiquaries of London in 1717, perhaps best known for his drawings of Stonehenge and Avebury and for his romanticisation of Druids. He visited the town in 1722 and drew at least one view of it from the East Cliff [also] naming it 'Lapis Tituli' (see below).

Folkestone also features within those other characteristic antiquarian surveys of the time, the county histories such the well known 1797 Survey of Kent by Edward Hasted<sup>29</sup> and the lesser known contribution of Charles Seymour who produced his 'Topographical, historical, and commercial survey of the cities, towns of Kent' in 1776. Such studies need to be seen in a broad social context; the county was not only the most meaningful geographical, political and administrative unit but was also the arena in which public actions and identity were legitimised. It was as important for the gentlemen antiquarians of the eighteenth century to establish the historical continuity of their counties as it was for Camden or Lambarde. Counties were 'the natural medium through which the legitimacy of the place of the landed gentry could be asserted'.<sup>30</sup> The genealogies and titles of the gentry and the authority which they held within society and imagination were legitimised by association with antiquity and antiquarian studies were often able to bring the two together.

It has been said that Antiquarian reports were essentially chorographical meaning a detailed written account of a region that combined natural and man-made features, landscape and history. They were more than this: antiquarians were interested in describing the whole nature and identity of the places visited including memory and mythology. In many ways such work anticipated the Romantic movement of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In the interest in place, the 'genius loci', there are also the antecedents of neo-Romantic approaches of the twentieth century.

The fact that such writing was often the result of journeys reinforces this connection. Antiquarianism was about experience and it conveyed the seen in a concrete and immediate way that historical writing of the same times did not. Writers such as Leland or Stukeley knew the land in the close way that results from travel, especially one it may be supposed on horseback. The experience and processes of travel and 'on the ground' familiarity with field and property boundaries, place names and connections was a powerful way of presenting and combining all of these features. In Folkestone and elsewhere this inclusion of the natural features of the landscape would later allow a seamless convergence of such interests in the approach of nineteenth-century writers such as Mackie who comfortably combined knowledge of geology, especially fossils, and natural history with that of antiquity. The implications of such combined approaches are often overlooked but they can reveal a great deal about underlying patterns of archaeology, geology and location that determine the character and history of a place and how it has been understood.<sup>31</sup>

The gradual growth of skills in surveying and cartography meant that such ideas could be more successfully conveyed, not just in writing but in maps and other images, and this visual topography reinforced and complemented antiquarian approaches. The years between the sixteenth

and eighteenth centuries saw the emergence of cartographical and surveying skills that allowed the representation of place in a different way. In Kent Symonson's 1596 Map exemplifies such developments. Such progress in recording was part of the foundations of the science that would become archaeology but they also reflected a shift of a different sort towards the imagination of the past. Antiquarian accounts such as those written about Folkestone represent the layering of time and place in a synchronized account which could be brought together through reflections on ancient sites, finds and the recording of knowledge, both formally and informally held about a place. **The following three brief studies from Folkestone are examples of just this sort of convergence of landscape, text and observation but also reflect some deeper levels of meaning and association that form recurring themes within the history of the town.**

*The Bayle – 'the terrible cliff'*<sup>32</sup>

The 'Bayle' is today seen as the old centre of Folkestone. It sits on a striking promontory overlooking the sea on the Western headland of the town, opposite to and visible from the East Cliff. Here an Anglo-Saxon royal minster was reputedly founded in the first half of the seventh century and associated with Eanswythe, possibly its first patroness, and daughter of King Eadbald (616-640) of Kent. As Barbara Yorke has pointed out this may indeed be amongst the very first royal religious foundations of this sort although the evidence is complex and uncertain.<sup>33</sup> Most histories have suggested that the minster was either abandoned due to raids or destroyed by erosion. Richard Cross, who has presented perhaps the most thorough history of this site to date,<sup>34</sup> has argued for greater continuity of such a settlement in the area of the Bayle pointing to charter evidence of 700 that refers to Folkestone as a 'monasterium' and demonstrating that in one form or another an ecclesiastical community continued here into the twelfth century when the monks were moved to a nearby site further back from the cliff, where the church of **St Mary and St Eanswythe** still stands.

The Bayle was visited and written about by most of the antiquarians who reported on Folkestone. When Leland visited in the late 1530s he saw the remains of the earlier monastery observing 'great and long Briton Brykes' and 'a grave trunche of squared stone' which he identified within the ruins.<sup>35</sup> Leland's association with earlier buildings (Roman or 'Briton') are repeated by Lambarde who writes: 'Only some broken walls, in which are seen great brickets, (the markers of British building) do remaine'<sup>36</sup>. In 1722 Stukeley noted 'I saw two pieces of old wall hanging ore the terrible cliff, seemingly of Roman work ... many roman coyns have been found. Here a nunnery was'. Later still Hasted repeated these observations describing the buildings in more detail:

A small part of the foundations, with an arch in the wall of it, about three feet from the ground, which is turned with Roman or British bricks (of which there are several among the ruined foundations).

Camden, whilst he noted the existence of a monastery in Anglo-Saxon times, had another point to add noting that in Folkestone ‘peeeces of Romane coine and Britaine bricke[s] [are] daily there found’. It is far from clear whether such finds were associated with the Bayle or with other areas of the town and as Cross has pointed out there is good reason to question the identification of the building material at least as Roman at all although we must assume that Camden who knew about coins would have recognised Roman examples.<sup>37</sup> The point here is less the precise location or indeed the dating of the objects found rather it is the way that the town is recurrently associated through such observations and finds with a lost significance and repute associated with both its Anglo-Saxon and Roman past. Leland, Lambarde and Camden make this point in a similar way. For Leland this is implicit in his description of the ruins of the ‘solemn old nunnery’ but by Camden the point is more clearly made:

Famous it was and much frequented by the English Saxons for religions sake, by reason of a Monasterie that Eanswide daughter to Eadbald King of Kent consecrated there unto Nunnes but now it is a small towne, and the greatest part thereof the Sea hath, as it were, pared away.<sup>38</sup>

The Bayle from an antiquarian perspective is not only a fascinating palimpsest of ancient remains but a symbol of historic grandeur that represents the history of the county and perhaps the country. Here was a very early Christian site, with evidence of earlier Roman occupation on it. What remains is an eroded cliff edge and the fragments of bricks found in ruins. The sea in this image stands for the relentless wearing away of time and the defiance of the Bayle to its ravages simply reinforces the significance of what remains; as the seventeenth-century antiquarian Philipot observed it seemed simply ‘a Morsel too hard for the teeth of time to consume’.<sup>39</sup> This somewhat eulogistic note is strongly reinforced by the rather macabre detail of the ruinous state of the site given by early accounts. Leland points to the human bones which stick out from the cliff edge: ‘The castel yard hath bene a place of great burial; yn so much as wher the se hath worn on the banke bones apere half stykyng owt’.<sup>40</sup> In Hasted: ‘the two vast heaps of skulls and bones piled up in two vaults under the churches of Folkestone and Hythe; which, from the number of them, could not but be from some battle. They appear, by their whiteness, to have been all bleached, by lying some time on the sea shore’. This was indeed, as Stukeley succinctly put it, a ‘terrible cliff’.

*The East Cliff and Castle Hill – 'white walls of Albion'*<sup>41</sup>

Of equal importance in this version of Folkestone's identity is the Eastern headland or East Cliff, a place which acts as a striking entrance to the town, overlooking the sea and situated in a striking position on the road that runs along the cliffs from Dover. This is a favourite viewpoint for artists and is the subject of dozens of watercolours and sketches dating back to the eighteenth century.

The prospect over this delightful vale of Folkestone from the hill, on the road from Dover as you descend to the town, is very beautiful indeed for the pastures and various fertility of the vale in the centre, beyond it the church and town of Hythe, Romney Marsh, and the high promontory of Beachy head, boldly stretching into the sea. On the right the chain of lofty down hills, covered with verdure, and cattle seeding on them; on the left the town of Folkestone, on the knole of a hill, close to the sea, with its scattered environs, at this distance a pleasing object, and beyond it the azure sea unbounded to the sight, except by the above-mentioned promontory, altogether from as pleasing a prospect as any in this county.<sup>42</sup>

As Hasted suggests this prospect offers a compressed view of several important landscapes. It is also a convergence of historical features; placing ourselves from the viewpoint of travellers and topographers approaching Folkestone along the old Dover road makes the significance of this area irresistibly clear. The road at this point descends, winding down past the striking earthworks of Castle Hill, until the nineteenth century often mistakenly identified as Roman. Castle Hill certainly occupies high ground overlooking the Channel. It is an impressive Norman castle which has attracted a wide range of speculation and association. Lambarde tells us that 'The Countrie people call it Castle-hill, and many of them heard the foundation thereof ascribed to King Ethelbert'.<sup>43</sup> Such earthworks were a magnet to antiquarian topographers of the seventeenth century who still lived in a landscape where the earthworks of the Civil War were clearly visible.

Above us on the cliffs is the start of the North Downs trackway which continues westwards an ancient line of connection between Kent and Salisbury Plain. Below us and inland a little once stood the ancient Chapel of St Botolph, noted by Leland as being built on much earlier remains, 'on a likelihood of farther Building' and which, in a ruined or intact condition, would have been visible in what was then an open, pastoral landscape. On our left stretching away to the horizon the English Channel across which on clear days the cliffs of France seem startlingly close. The symbolic resonance of such features is that they combine the defining boundaries of 'Albion' and its white cliffs with historic symbols. Such features would

have seemed important signposts to the town's history and character for the antiquaries and would have leant themselves to association with the histories and accounts that were familiar to them.

Leland must have visited the chapel of St Botolph, 'toward a quarter of a myle out of the town' noting what must have been some visible older remains and gives us a fascinating anecdote about the finding of treasure there or nearby: 'a Boote almost ful of Antiquites of pure Gold and Sylver'.<sup>44</sup> These it's reputed were given or extracted from their finder, 'a poore man' and given to Lord Clynton a descendent of the local lords of the manor and grandfather of the Mayor of Folkestone at the time of Leland's visit. The reference to finds of gold antiquities in the area is intriguing but can be little more. In this, as in other cases, such accounts work to emphasise that Folkestone is a landscape that yields finds and treasure and where the vestiges of the ancient past are so plentiful that they lie concealed within its soil.

From other antiquarian perspectives this part of Folkestone is important because it represents important aspects of boundary that are tangible locations within the long narrative of Britain's defence and consequent identity. From this viewpoint places such as Castle Hill and the East Cliff are important for the understanding of national history and the precedents and legitimacy that such history conveys. One notable example of this is the assertion made in various accounts that Folkestone was the site of a defensive structure in Roman times, perhaps part of the string of defences, forts or stations that ringed the coast known as the 'Saxon Shore forts'. Early antiquarians would have been aware of the idea of such defences which are mentioned in both Gildas and Nennius, they would also have known the *Notitia Dignitatum* which gave names to nine forts of the Saxon Shore; Folkestone would have been recognised as sitting between two of them, Dover (*Dubris*) and Lympne (*Lemanis*). With this in mind it is not surprising that such connections were important to early antiquaries who linked them with both Castle Hill and with the less obvious area of the East Cliff. Lambarde simply states that Folkestone is the site of: 'one of those turrets which the Romans planted by certaine distances upon the south shoare of our lande against the landing of the Saxons',<sup>45</sup> adding about Castle Hill that 'there are yet extant to the eye the ruined walls of an ancient fortification which for the height thereof might serve as a watchtower to espie the enemie'.

Camden's association of the town and its environs with Roman defences is clear, based on Gildas:

Probable it is that it was one of those towres or holds which in the reigne of Theodosius the younger the Romans placed for to keep off the Saxons, as Gildas saith, *at certaine distances along the shore in the South part of Britaine*.<sup>46</sup>

For John Somner the location of the 'turret' seemed likely to have been Castle Hill (today known locally as Caesar's Camp); an equally attractive candidate would be 'Copt Point' a Greensand outcrop which reaches into the sea and overlooks 'Jock's Pitch' the site where later the Roman Villa was found.

As with the Bayle, the purpose here is not to debate the viability of these ideas. Whether Folkestone was the site of a Roman marine base or signalling station has been the source of significant speculation and there is as yet no real evidence other than the finds of a number of *Classis Britannica* tiles to support the idea. Rather it is worth noting the ideological meaning of such associations. That each generation of accounts was drawn to similar positions may not just be due to the antiquarian habit of cross reference nor to the primacy of early texts such as Gildas but must also owe something to the geological contours of this coastal strip and its clear relationship to the Channel and Continent which make it seem a natural place for such a site to be. The East Cliff we now know was indeed a Roman site though whether defensive or not seems a moot point. It is also a place which carries meaning because of its location, in a liminal position between Downland and Weald, overlooking the Channel and confronting the continent the landscape itself carried the suggestion of significance which could only have been reinforced by what early modern observers took to be the remains of ancient buildings and fortifications. We can only speculate whether there were other surface finds that may have reinforced this. Folkestone was already associated with Roman buildings, building fabric and other finds including coins and there may well have been finds of similar material on the East Cliff. In this way, antiquarian accounts and the topographical sensitivity of such early visions were woven into known histories and evidence to create a convincing picture, so convincing that it resonates down the centuries.

#### *Folkestone as 'Lapis Tituli'*

One final example from Folkestone's rich early antiquarian history must be the strange story of 'Lapis Tituli' a place name associated with the celebrated, though ultimately fruitless, struggle against the Saxons chronicled in the sixth century within the writings of the monk Gildas and in the ninth within the *Historia Britonnum* attributed to Nennius. Here again the shoreline of Folkestone came to be cited as a central place of defence, but in this instance associated with a great battle fought between Britons and Saxons which saw the Saxons routed. The fullest accounts of these events appear in the Nennius text, in which the battle is described as the last of four heroic clashes, a last surge of resistance against the forces of Hengist and Horsa, led by the British prince Vortimer son of Vortigern: '... the fourth battle he fought, was near the stone on the shore of the Gallic sea, where the Saxons being defeated, fled to their ships.'<sup>47</sup>

Such reports have a blurred heroic and perhaps semi-legendary colour and perhaps they were never intended to be read as a strictly accurate account. Later antiquarians though were able to extrapolate from such sources in their search for the location of these battles. The key here was the Latin name given by Nennius. Whilst Camden associated ‘Lapis Tituli’ with Stonar in Thanet later authors, notably Somner, argued that it was more likely to have been Folkestone in large part because of the similarity between it and ‘lapis populi’ the translation of the name of the town made by Lambarde. The debate is summarised in Hasted’s account:

There is much difference among writers as to the place where this battle was fought; some asserting it to have been at Wippedesflete, now Ebbsfleet, in Thanet; but as the Britons drove the Saxons, after this battle, into that island, the field of battle could not be in it. Nennius and others say, it was fought in a field on the shore of the Gallic sea, where stood the Lapis Tituli, which Camden and Usher take to be Stonar, in the isle of Thanet; but Somner and Stillingfleet [Edward Stillingfleet], instead of Lapis Tituli, read Lapis Populi, that is, Folkestone, where this battle was fought.<sup>48</sup>

An earlier reference to the debate is the work of the seventeenth-century antiquarian cleric Archdeacon John Battely’s account of ‘The Antiquities of Richborough and Reculver’ published in English in 1774.<sup>49</sup>

The title of ‘Lapis Tituli’ must still have had some resonance when the town was visited in 1722 by William Stukeley. As a glance at published version of his notebooks suggests, he chose this name as the most meaningful and earliest name for the landscape of the East Cliff though perhaps distinguishing this from Folkestone itself. Stukeley’s drawing (**Fig. 2**) makes a revealing contribution to part of this complex narrative thread; it is not an accurate view although drawn from what must have been the hills above the East Cliff; it shows a small rounded hill, possibly Copt Point, boats in the harbour below and a Neptune-like merman watching over the waves, indicating a fusion of symbolic, historical and contemporary significance. Surely for Stukeley Folkestone and the East Cliff in particular were important because of it was for him ‘Lapis Tituli’ and in that name conveyed a long lineage which perhaps pivoted on this ancient battle and the association with the identities of Briton and Roman Briton that it held. We know that for Stukeley the ‘itinerarium’ journeys were a British version of the grand tours of classical sites that were popular at this time. Stukeley was well briefed by his friend Maurice Johnson<sup>50</sup> in classical sources that were relevant to Britain and to the earlier antiquarian authors such as Camden; for him Folkestone was a place that had seen defining moments in the long struggles, accretions and defeats that made ‘Britain’ and from this perspective alone it was worthy of note. The significance of the Lapis Tituli debates, antiquarian writers and

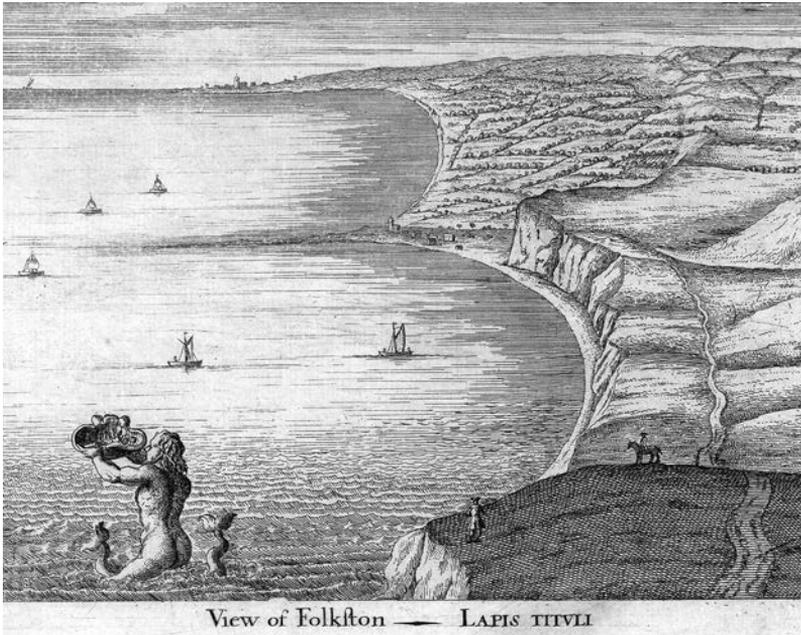


Fig. 2 William Stukeley's 'Lapis Tituli' drawing of Folkestone. (By permission, courtesy Folkestone Library.)

the associations that they made with Caesar, Horsa, Vortimer and others formed a precedent and a basis of myth-history which would be picked up by later writers and in this way entered into the story of the town.

## Conclusion

What is the significance of such sources and their usage for our understanding of antiquarianism in general and its place within the story of Folkestone in particular? The process is a rather frustrating one, antiquarian writing is an elusive pursuit, its tendency to attach ancient meaning to relatively modern place names, its cross references and referrals, vagueness matched with an almost equal and opposite commitment to precise citation of classical and other sources, can all be tricky for the modern historian; it is important nevertheless to attempt to understand the motives and perspectives of these writers. Antiquarianism is an approach which today we tend to find full of fault and error. As Haverfield pointed out in his Ford lectures of 1910, at a time when

archaeology was making itself distinct from its antiquarian predecessors, such faults were passed on in a long lineage of error and association from one antiquarian account to another. Other things were passed on though: ways recording and bringing together the features of a particular landscape and the historical remains within it; the habit of associating specific sites with histories and names known from classical sources; the inclusion of local folklore and anecdote. As has been suggested, in Folkestone a sense of loss and of transience pervades these accounts. All of these combine to make antiquarian writing quite a holistic, if at times wildly inaccurate, way of seeing the past; one that has appeal for a number of different approaches and which casts a long shadow over histories, guidebooks and indeed archaeological interpretation. As David Starkey comments in an introductory survey of the subject: 'it was all nonsense but compelling nonsense'.<sup>51</sup> Antiquarian writing, as Folkestone shows, is formative to our understanding of the history and identity of a place and the stories that it tells are important reminders of how the past is understood and used at different times and with different motives to our own. Antiquarianism, however, can do more than this and throws light on some of the fundamental patterns, associations and perspectives that percolate down to us and persist in the way that places and sites are seen, interpreted and remembered.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> John Burrow, 2009, *A History of Histories*, London, p. 315.

<sup>2</sup> Such discoveries are thanks to research into Folkestone Museum Archives by 'A Town Unearthed' Research Group members including Eamonn Rooney, Richard Cross and Ann and Thierry Biot, Lorraine Flischer, Iain Neilson and Kevin Harvey.

<sup>3</sup> William Camden, 1637, *Britannia* (trans. Philemon Holland) (2nd edn), p. 246.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Hingley, 2000, *Roman Officers and English Gentlemen: the Imperial Origins of Roman Archaeology*, Oxford, p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> R.G. Collingwood, 1939, *An Autobiography*, Oxford.

<sup>6</sup> For example, Polydore Vergil, *Anglica Historia*, first published in 1534.

<sup>7</sup> William Lambarde, 1826, *A Perambulation of Kent, containing the description, hystorie, and customes of that shire; written in the yeere 1570, first published in the year 1576, and now increased and altered from the author's owne last copie*, Baldwin, Chadock and Joy, p. 123.

<sup>8</sup> Virginia Hoselitz, 2007, *Imagining Roman Britain*, Royal Historical Society, p. 10.

<sup>9</sup> *Notitia Dignitatum* or Register of Dignitaries, 1999, in *Translations and Reprints from Original Sources of European History*, vol. VI, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> 'The Laboriouse Journey and Serche of Johan Leylande', in Lucy Toulmin-Smith (ed.), 1907, *The Itinerary of John Leland in or About the Years 1535-1543*, London, p. xxxvii.

<sup>11</sup> William Camden, 1695, 'Mr Camden's Preface', in *Britannia*, Edmund Gibson (ed.).

<sup>12</sup> 'The Epistle of Gildas' and the 'History of Britain', 1875, in J.A. Giles (trans.), *Six Old English Chronicles*; Bede, 2008, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, Bertram Colgrave (trans.), Oxford.

<sup>13</sup> Camden, 1637, *op. cit.* (see note 3).

<sup>14</sup> Burrow, 2009, *op. cit.* (see note 1), p. 315.

<sup>15</sup> Stuart Piggott, 1976, *Ruins in a Landscape*, Edinburgh, p. 43.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

<sup>17</sup> Hingley, 2000, *op. cit.* (see note 4), p. 39.

<sup>18</sup> Sir Barry Cunliffe, 2012, *Britain Begins*, Oxford; Norman Vance, 1997, *The Victorian and Ancient Rome*, Oxford; Sam Smiles, 1994, *The Image of Antiquity*.

<sup>19</sup> Camden, 'Preface', in *Britannia* (see note 11).

<sup>20</sup> There is some uncertainty about the dates of the first harbour at Folkestone; however, some light was thrown on this by excavations led by Canterbury Archaeological Trust at the site of the Harbour Street car-park (2000-2003) which revealed both evidence of a wooden quayside dating to the 1650s at the latest and of a long stone harbour wall. Finds from this site including pottery and leather shoe fragments were dated back to the fourteenth century. Taken as a whole these findings point towards a mediaeval estuarine harbour at the bottom of the Old High Street and fanning out diagonally across South Street and the Harbour Street car park where the sea met the mouth of the Pent Stream.

<sup>21</sup> See Graham Parry, 2007, 'The Discovery of Britain', in *Making History: Antiquaries in Britain 1707-2007*, D. Gaimster, S.M. McCarthy, B. Nurse (eds), Society of Antiquaries, pp. 15-37.

<sup>22</sup> Piggott, 1976, *op. cit.* (see note 15), p. 11.

<sup>23</sup> Leland, *op. cit.* (see note 10), vol. viii, p. 47.

<sup>24</sup> Lambarde, *op. cit.* (see note 7), p. 154.

<sup>25</sup> Felix Hull, 1956, 'Kentish Historiography', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, 70, 221-30; see also Margaret Roake, 1973, *Essays in Kentish History*, Economic History Review series, London.

<sup>26</sup> John Harris, 1719, *The History of Kent in Five Parts*.

<sup>27</sup> Rosemary Sweet, 2004, *Antiquaries: The Discovery of the Past in Eighteenth Century Britain*.

<sup>28</sup> Piggott, *op. cit.* (see note 15), pp. 113-123.

<sup>29</sup> Edward Hasted, 1797, *The History and Topographical Survey of the County of Kent*.

<sup>30</sup> Sweet, *op. cit.* (see note 27), p. 36.

<sup>31</sup> In Folkestone and the East Cliff this is of particular importance as here the connection between geology and archaeology is a close and dynamic one, dictating the terms not only of the original settlement but also the circumstances of archaeological discovery and identification.

<sup>32</sup> William Stukeley, 1776, *Itinerarium Curiosum* (2nd ed.), p. 124.

<sup>33</sup> Barbara Yorke, 2003, *Nunneries and the Anglo Saxon Royal Houses*, p. 23.

<sup>34</sup> Richard Cross, 2011, 'Talk to the Bayle Residents Association'; transcribed and available on website 'atownunearthed.co.uk'.

<sup>35</sup> *The Itinerary of John Leland in or about the Years 1535-1543*, Lucy Toulmin-Smith (ed.), 1907, p. 141.

<sup>36</sup> Lambarde, *op. cit.* (see note 7), p. 153.

<sup>37</sup> Some of the earliest Post-Conquest eleventh-century bricks or tiles are very similar in manufacturing technique, size and colour to Roman wall tiles. Both, for instance, can be found in light orange-red fabrics, although Roman tiles are generally slightly longer and thicker. Some of the early medieval bricks also have black cores and very coarse textured bodies. A fragmentary example of this type was recovered during excavations in the Bayle in 1981. It was of a type made in England from the early/mid twelfth to the thirteenth century and all are known to later medieval and early modern writers as 'Great Bricks'.

<sup>38</sup> Camden, 1637, *op. cit.* (see note 3), p. 349.

<sup>39</sup> Thomas Philipot, 1659, *Villare Cantianum*, p. 158.

<sup>40</sup> Confirmed by the 1698 Radnor estate map.

<sup>41</sup> Walter Jerrold, 1920, *Folkestone and Dover*, p. 6.

<sup>42</sup> Hasted, *op. cit.* (see note 29), p. 145.

<sup>43</sup> Lambarde, *op. cit.* (see note 7), p. 155.

<sup>44</sup> The Chapel, clearly not a ruin in the 1530s, was also mentioned in the town records of 1543: 'Given in reward unto the King's Minstrels before St Botulppe' and later in the Warden's Accounts for 1573 which contain an item for carrying turf 'from Buttol's forestall to the butts'; Richard Cross has argued in unpublished research that : 'Leland's observations of traces of further building around the Chapel of St Botolph in the 1540s and the occurrence of unaccompanied east-west inhumations points to a pre-conquest, possibly seventh to eighth century A.D. church in the vicinity of Folly Fields, reusing and adapting a Roman building'.

<sup>45</sup> Lambarde, *op. cit.* (see note 7), p. 153.

<sup>46</sup> Camden, 1637, *op. cit.* (see note 3), p. 349.

<sup>47</sup> Nennius, 'History of The Britons', section 44 in J.A. Giles (ed.), 1875, *Six Old English Chronicles*.

<sup>48</sup> Hasted, *op. cit.* (see note 29), p. 58.

<sup>49</sup> John Batteley, 1774, *The Antiquities of Richborough and Reculver. Abridged from the Latin*, Oxford.

<sup>50</sup> David Boyd Haycock, 2002, *William Stukeley: Science, Religion and Archaeology in Eighteenth-Century England*, [www.newtonproject.sussex.ac.uk](http://www.newtonproject.sussex.ac.uk).

<sup>51</sup> David Starkey, 2007, 'Introduction', in Gaimster, *et al.* (eds), *op. cit.* (see note 21), p. 11.