

# Navigating History

**Rob Illingworth, Team Librarian, Local Studies at Folkestone Library** appeals for help with a new project

In Summer 1888 a visitor to Folkestone could descend from the Leas on the Leas Cliff Lift, promenade the Victoria Pier, take a thrilling ride on the Switchback Railway or be dazzled by the optical illusions of the Camera Obscura.

Colourful episodes such as these are to be celebrated in *The Folkes by the Sea*, a short film exploring Folkestone's rich history of seaside attractions. The film is part of *Navigating History*, a unique series of nine commissions by practitioners which are inspired by local history and heritage collections.

"There's a lot of material about Folkestone in national collections of film," explains Steve Connolly, filmmaker. He will be working on the project with me, in my position as Team Librarian, Local Studies at Folkestone Library. "But this official footage, while showing important events, doesn't focus on how visitors and residents actually enjoyed the seaside. I would like the film to show people having fun in Folkestone."

Hence the project team are looking for amateur film footage of Folkestone residents and visitors enjoying a summer break by the sea. "Home movies were a big hobby from the 1930s right up to the end of the 1970s," says Steve. "Everybody must know a relation or friend with some film cans in the attic."

I share his enthusiasm. In the Folkestone Heritage Room we try to use our resources to tell the stories of local people and their communities. Film is a fantastic way to animate these stories and bring them to a wider audience.

Selected footage will be transferred from film to video, and returned to contributors who will be then able to enjoy their material on the TV at home. The South East Film and Video Archive, based in Brighton, will also view the films, and contributors may be asked if they wish to deposit their material in this publicly accessible collection.

The Folkestone Heritage Room at Folkestone Library is the collection point for films.

Alternatively, get in touch by e-mail: [robert.illingworth@kent.gov.uk](mailto:robert.illingworth@kent.gov.uk)

*But hurry!* The film must be completed by September this year so get those film reels to Folkestone Library right away! The deadline for film submission is 31 August.

*Navigating History* takes place from 4 October to 27 November 2004 at East Sussex Record Office in Lewes, Folkestone Library and Museum, and West Sussex Local Studies Archive in Worthing Central Library.

The Navigating History project is also looking for information about these Folkestone entertainers:

## 'Professor' EL Davies, Ventriloquist & Proprietor of Camera Obscura

is open to give his entertainments at private or public parties. Being in communication with one of the best London Firms for the hire of first-class Lecture Sets of Slides and having a pair of the finest Lime-light Lanterns in the world, he can exhibit any Lecture Set of Slides chosen out of 70,000. As a Ventriloquist he is A1, having Five Life-size Figures.

The Camera Obscura will be open on the Beach on all fine days during the Winter Months. Admission-2d; Children, Half-price.

[Taken & Adapted from *Holbein's Visitors List And Folkestone Journal* 2 Nov. 1887]

We have already found out a lot about Edward Longford Davies who moved to Folkestone in about 1886. He lived in at least three Folkestone addresses: 7 Young's Road (Black Bull Road), 85 Black Bull Road, and 3 Spring Cottages. Sadly, he died in 1892 and is buried in the Folkestone Town Burial Ground at Cheriton.

Do you know more about 'Professor' Davies or other Camera Obscura owners? There was a Camera Obscura on the West Beach at Folkestone until the 1930s.

## 'Lord' Charlie Banks

'Mr Charles William Banks was a well-known resident of Folkestone in the early 1900s when he ran a circus procession in which many of his fishermen friends participated. It was in this respect that he earned the nickname 'Lord Charles Banks'. He would hire animal skins from London at 10/- each and he and his friends would dress up in them. The circus cages were made by those interested and horses were loaned to him. The circus was run for the benefit of the Royal Victoria Hospital.'

[Taken & adapted from an obituary in the *Folkestone & Hythe Gazette* 6 Apr. 1955]

Nobody could have a more varied career. Charlie Banks was a theatre stagehand, soldier, fruiterer, comedian, political activist, songwriter, playwright and actor.

Do you know more about him? There are lovely photographs of the circus and, perhaps, film footage. Have you seen these images?

Any information will be gratefully received by Rob Illingworth & the Navigating History Team  
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