

History of The Bayle

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The earliest evidence for activity on the headland has come from archaeological excavations in 2006-7 on the site of Henwood, to the rear of the Dancing Studios. At the northern end of the site, three large pits, 1m wide x 1.6m deep, were excavated, all of which appeared to have been deliberately backfilled with what archaeologists call structured deposits. One pit had a well defined post-pipe demonstrating that these pits were part of a timber structure, but insufficient evidence was found to determine what they related to. Finds recovered from the fills included late Neolithic pottery dating to about 2500-2100 BC. Of equal significance was an intact deposit overlying the natural Greensand subsoil containing Neolithic flint flakes and tools including scrapers.

The headland would almost certainly have also been occupied during the Late Iron Age Roman periods. Unfortunately we know very little about what type of settlement occurred on the headland during these periods. The archaeological evidence recovered during investigations at various sites on the Bayle has been limited to small groups of Late Iron Age/Belgic pottery dating from the first half of the first century AD and equally small groups of Roman pottery. None of these finds have been recovered from features such as refuse pits dated to the Late Iron Age or Roman periods, but rather as residual finds in much later twelfth century deposits and features. Early antiquarians, such as William Camden in the 1550s and William Stukeley in 1722 also noted the common occurrence of finds of Roman coins from Folkestone in contexts that indicate the Bayle headland.

With the exception of one small worn fragment of Roman tile from the site at Henwood, as far as I know there are no other confirmed finds of Roman building material from the Bayle, no other tiles, mortar or masonry. There are a few antiquarian accounts however that have been taken to suggest the presence of Roman buildings on the Bayle. In the mid sixteenth century John Leland noted that

'yn the walls whereof yn divers places apere a great and long Briton brikes' and William Lambarde observed *'some broken walles, in which are seen great bricks (the markes of Bryttish building)'* Later, in 1722, William Stukeley saw *'two pieces of old wall'*, on the edge of the cliff, *'seemingly of Roman work'*. Much later, in about 1790, Edward Hasted observed *'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)'*.

The interpretation of these structures as Roman rests on the description of tiles used as building material as Roman or British bricks. 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 to mid twelfth to the thirteenth centuries and all are known to later medieval and early modern writers as 'Great Bricks'. Evidence has accumulated to suggest that the tile like shape of the early medieval 'Great Brick' was introduced in the twelfth century from southern Europe, mainly from France and Italy, by the great monastic orders. The type in general terms gives way in the mid thirteenth century to the standard brick shape and size, a form introduced from the Low Countries first as ships ballast and later by émigré Flemish brickmakers. It is this period that also witnessed the earliest use, in 1340, of the word '*brik*'.

In Middle English the term was '*waltyle*' and in Old English '*weall-tyghle*'. This distinction between tile used as an occasional building material and bricks used as the sole type is an important one.

On the basis of these accounts it is difficult to accept with any degree of certainty that the structures referred to were of Roman build. William Stukeley's observations in 1722 are especially important, as he had first hand knowledge of Roman structures from elsewhere and was hesitant about the supposed Roman date of the ruins he saw on the Bayle. In the absence then of more direct archaeological evidence it seems probable that the '*bricks*' seen by the sixteenth and eighteenth century antiquaries at Folkestone were, at the earliest, late eleventh century in date and consistent with their use in ecclesiastical buildings forming part of the first Norman priory established on the Bayle.

This has not however prevented highly speculative suggestions that the Bayle was an important Roman site with monumental structures, perhaps a watch tower or signal station although not going so far as to suggest a fort, admitting that there was probably simply not enough room to accommodate one.

Nevertheless residual finds of Late Iron Age and Roman pottery occur wherever archaeological investigations have been undertaken on the Bayle. The Roman pottery is particularly interesting in that it includes early Roman grey wares dating from the mid to late first century through to the early second century, second century Samian ware and fourth century Oxfordshire ware, that is it spans the whole Roman period. Such material would not have travelled far before its place of final deposition and this, coupled with the finding of finer Samian wares, is indicative of permanent settlement. What form this activity took, however, in terms of date, form and purpose remains unanswered.

Not surprisingly Folkestone as a whole has produced little archaeological evidence for the post-Roman period, that is for the two centuries following the end of Roman administration in the early fifth century. It is interesting to note however that whilst the Roman site on the east Cliff has produced only a few sherds of mid-late Saxon pottery, the best recorded evidence is from the Bayle. This consists of a late fifth century cremation burial found in about 1850 during excavations for the foundations of new buildings. The find comprised fragments of a burial urn, burnt bone, together with a large iron spear head or sword fragment. The spear or sword are out of place in a fifth century context and it is likely that the workmen who recovered these finds also disturbed a later seventh century burial. The finds were reported by the then local historian Samuel Joseph Mackie and exhibited at the Society of Antiquaries in London so their authenticity and date is probably correct. In my previous talk on medieval Folkestone I gave a detailed account of the historical development of the early medieval monastery at Folkestone which I will in part repeat. From the outset however it is important to note that it is only in about 700 that Folkestone is first recorded as a distinctly named place as *Folcanstan*. Moreover that Folkestone is synonymous with the monastery at Folkestone recorded in a succession of pre-conquest charters and that the monastery has always been traditionally accepted as having been sited on the Bayle. The charter of 700 also confirms the existence of the monastery as it sets out privileges of the Kentish churches and monasteries against which the abbess of Folkestone appears as a signatory. The abbess is not named, but she may have succeeded Eanswythe who from an early date has been associated with Folkestone. The earliest reference for this however occurs in the mid eleventh century Kentish Royal Legend which records that Eanswythe was the daughter of Eadbald, king of Kent and that he founded a nunnery for her at Folkestone where she was buried. Besides this we know nothing else about Eanswythe.

Other traditions concerning her are derived from later medieval sacred biography and chroniclers, such as John Capgrave, William Thorne and Gervase of Canterbury and viewed separately as stories embellishing the life and seeking to confirm the sanctity of Eanswythe.

Nevertheless the association of Eanswythe with Folkestone can be accepted. There is no foundation charter for the monastery at Folkestone and it could in fact have been established at any time during her life and probably then dates from the second half of the seventh century, sometime after 650. Even so it can be classed as one of the earliest monastic institutions founded in Kent. Understanding the context in which the monastery at Folkestone was established is important. It was founded during the Conversion Period, following the re-introduction of Christianity to England by St Augustine in 597, at a time when there were close connections between Kent and Merovingian Gaul where religious houses of this type were already well established. It was also founded with a royal guarantor, her father Eadbald (d. 640). Royal patronage of female monasticism at this time was a complex blend of religious, political, social and economic issues and entry into the religious life during this period was one of the gendered roles for women in the nexus of the royal kin-groups of early Anglo-Saxon England, in this context the family of Eadbald and his son Earconberht. Whilst the religious role may have been the principal and more significant one for Eanswythe, safeguarding sections of the royal domain against the depredations of rival, and often related, dynasties formed an important reason for the foundation of such a monastery, especially when there must have been a considerable investment of resources in establishing and maintaining it. Folkestone then was a monastic aristocratic institution with an attached congregation of secular clerics, an arrangement which has given rise to the modern term of double minsters.

As we have seen, by 700 Folkestone was described as a *monasterium*. There is no evidence for the monastery during the eighth century, but it seems likely that the community of clerks settled at Folkestone developed independently of the monastic body so that by the early ninth century it was well established, being endowed with property of its own. Much the same can be deduced from an account dating from 844 recounting the settlement at Canterbury by the Archbishop of disputed estates. The language used in the charter is precisely applicable to the existence at Folkestone of a community of secular clerks, '*familia*' established by the archbishop.

It has been supposed that in the later ninth century Folkestone, like other monastic houses, became untenable under the threat of Danish seaborne raids. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle records that Minster-in-Sheppey was attacked as early as 835 by the Danes who, in 851, stormed Canterbury. Although no direct evidence exists for the fate of Folkestone, it is perhaps reasonable to assume a similar situation there. This has been based largely on a charter, a grant by King Athelstan, apparently dating to 927, that gave to Christ Church Priory, Canterbury, land at Folkestone stating that this was where was once a monastery and where St Eanswida was buried, adding that the place had been destroyed by '*pagani*'. The charter also records that Aethelstan's gift was made in order that the monastery should be restored. The charter however does not survive as a single sheet original document, but as a copy amongst the archives of Christ Church, Canterbury, and in its formulae is not an authentic copy and borders on being a forgery, perhaps compiled to secure the estate at Folkestone for Christ Church, Canterbury. In the eight surviving charters of the ninth and tenth centuries referring to Folkestone there is no mention of an abbess and the restoration of the church at Folkestone was probably part of a process of separating the monastic community from the clerics serving the parochial system of ecclesiastical organization. In three charters of the eleventh century there are references only to priests at Folkestone.

The destruction of Folkestone recorded in the charter of 927 can probably be related to the entry in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for 933, which records how the Norwegian king Anlaf came 'with 93 ships to Folkestone and harried outside'. Again, in 1052, the Chronicle records the account of Earl Godwine and his son Harold, their depredations along the southern seaboard of Kent and the seizing of hostages and any ships found serviceable at Folkestone. The account of Earl Godwine's depredations and the varying values later given for Folkestone in Domesday Book have been cited to suggest the final destruction of the monastery at Folkestone. It is unlikely however that Godwine would have devastated, even in part, his own earldom and the Chronicle in the same entry records how he had already won over the support of the people of Kent.

Whatever the outcome of the Danish raids of the late tenth and eleventh centuries, Folkestone appears to have weathered the attacks, surviving as a centre of ecclesiastical life, but perhaps with its endowment diminished and the *parochia* altered and shrunken into the form listed in the Domesday Monachorum, a survey of the ecclesiastical organization of Kent compiled in about 1100. The survey records Folkestone as the head-church, a minster, of a large *parochia* with subordinate churches and chapels located at ten other places, including Hawkinge, Cheriton, Hougham and Alkham. The organization is perhaps reminiscent of a much earlier system, perhaps reflecting the original extent of the endowment that must have gone along with the foundation of the monastery at Folkestone in the later seventh century, and out of which were later carved the medieval parishes of the area, served by the community of priests known to have been based at Folkestone. The Domesday Monachorum, providing a link with the Norman period, is the last source of evidence for the Anglo-Saxon church and monastic community at Folkestone.

The late Saxon charters moreover clearly indicate the continued presence of the church at Folkestone following the Danish raids of the mid to late tenth century. What form this took, apart from the development of proprietary churches as centres of parochial life, is difficult to assess and it is uncertain whether Folkestone remained as a monastic community in the tenth and eleventh centuries. At best the charters emphasize the close links by then established with Canterbury and it is probable that Christ Church enjoyed the revenues from Folkestone during the late Saxon period.

Having charted the foundation and development of the monastic community and church of Folkestone what do we know of the archaeology of the mid to late Saxon monasteries and churches? There is in fact no archaeological evidence, no building remains or materials to indicate the form and layout of the early monastery at Folkestone. It can be assumed to have comprised a small single-cell church, perhaps with an apse at the eastern end with side chapels added later, along with a range of domestic buildings, either timber or stone built. From this perspective it is an assumption that it was sited on the West Cliff in the area of what later became known as the Bayle, but the topography, an isolated headland overlooking the sea, suggests this was an ideal location to site an early monastic community. There is also the evidence of the presence of later churches on the headland, and it was also the area chosen for the foundation of the later medieval priory. It would also not be out of place to suggest that there was some form of adoptive use of ruinous Roman buildings on the headland but as we have seen there is no evidence for such buildings.

There is some other archaeological evidence for the mid-late Saxon periods from Folkestone. There are a few gold Merovingian coins and early seventh century silver pennies dating from between 590 and 750, recorded as from Folkestone, probably from the Bayle. Such finds may of course have come from burials, but finds of late seventh century silver pennies is indicative of the presence of the minster also perhaps serving as a stimulus to the development of a port of trade in the eighth century. What form this took and how this developed is unknown, but the 1052 entry in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle demonstrates the presence of a seafaring community during this period with perhaps some form of sheltered anchorage in existence at the foot of the West Cliff.

There is also the observations of the early sixteenth century antiquarian John Leland who noted that:

'The castel yard hath bene a place of great burial ; yn so much as wher the se hath woren on the banke bones apere half stykyng owt.' This is confirmed by notations on the later estate plan of 1698 of *'bones stickyng in the cliffe'* on the edge of the Bayle.

Again in the 1850s, Mackie observed that

'The ground in the vicinity is literally full of human skeletons, lying, apparently without any regard to position, and often within a few inches of the surface of the road. Quantities of bones are invariably thrown up whenever any excavations are made.'

There are a few more modern records of inhumation burials, on the site of the retirement apartments at the corner of the Bayle, and at various other locations a number of other inhumations have been reported as having been found during building works. Where recorded these inhumations, orientated east-west and lacking any associated grave goods, are probably Christian and late seventh century to early twelfth century in date, comprising parts of successive unenclosed lay and monastic cemeteries associated with the mid to late Saxon monasteries and churches on the Bayle.

The best archaeological evidence however has come from the excavations at the Henwood site where a series of inter-cutting refuse pits, some backfilled in the mid-late Saxon period during the ninth and tenth century, others backfilled in the early Norman period, between 1075-1125 were excavated. One pit contained a clay mould used for the production of small items of decorative metalwork. Stylistically this can be dated to the eighth to ninth century and is clear evidence for metalworking. These refuse pits would have been located to the rear of properties, buildings that would have fronted onto the Bayle. The pits also produced residual sherds of pottery that can be dated as early as the seventh century, the first tangible material evidence for occupation on this headland during this period. Other excavations elsewhere on the Bayle have also produced quantities of late Saxon pottery, including during the investigations on the edge of the cliff in 1981.

What remained of the monastery, if anything survived of the fabric of the original buildings at all, was possibly seen by the early antiquarians John Leland, William Lambarde and William Stukeley as described in the accounts previously referred to. As has also been seen the evidence as a whole would seem to point towards a late eleventh century date for the buildings described.

More compelling is the evidence of the sites of two churches indicated on the 1698 map of the Radnor Folkestone Estate denoted as '*ruins of a church*', one of a pair so described, on the cliff edge of the Bayle. These ruins, visible and extant from the mid sixteenth century either relate to the later ninth and tenth century minster churches or perhaps the first Benedictine Priory founded within the Bayle in 1095. In either case the survival of these buildings through to the end of the mid nineteenth century suggests that erosion of the headland has not been so severe as to suggest that all trace of the mid to late Saxon minster and churches has been lost.

The Domesday Book entry for Folkestone makes no mention of the Bayle, of the coast and harbour, perhaps because the minster and its estate had by then fallen under the direct control of Christ Church, Canterbury and owed no obligation in terms of tax or vassalage. The inference is also that there was no town, as there are no burgesses or others listed, and that as a central place Folkestone as we know it consisted only of a diminished ecclesiastical estate and a small seafaring community with a small stade by the end of the tenth century. By the eleventh century this situation appears to have changed.

In the late eleventh century the Lordship or Honour of Folkestone was held by Nigel de Muneville. In 1095 he granted the church of St Eanswythe, and all other churches of his demesne, along with various other possessions, to the Benedictine Abbey of Loulay in France, at once re-founding the monastic community, but clearly defining it as an alien priory. For forty years or so the new priory was located within the area of the Bayle, and it is likely that one or more of the churches described as ruinous on the 1698 map of the Folkestone estate belonged to this monastery. The source for this re-founding of the monastic community at Folkestone is a later grant of confirmation made to the monks in 1137 by William de Abrincis, the then Lord of Folkestone. The charter is known only from a copy made in 1425, but refers to the removal of the monks from the castle of Folkestone, where they were founded, to a new church outside, the present church of SS Mary & Eanswythe, and gives the reason as being that they were apprehensive of the state of the cliff. Thereafter the church served as both a parochial one and as the conventual church to the new Benedictine priory. The priory was finally surrendered in November 1535 following a visitation in October when it was reported that it was occupied only by the prior and one sick monk, that the parish church belonged to the priory, which with the glebe lands, formed almost its whole revenue. The house was described as in decay, consisting of one hall, one chamber, a kitchen, and a little parlour underground. Although the barns were well filled with corn, there were only a few cattle. The Prior and monk were said to be both guilty of serious offences. At the time of its surrender in November however the house was described as being well repaired, the prior a good husband, being later granted a pension, who was beloved by his neighbours. The property was first leased to the Edward Lord Clinton, the Lord of Folkestone and subsequently granted to him in January 1539. The buildings of the second Norman priory survived into the seventeenth century as depicted in elevation on a plan of 1625. By the later eighteenth century the buildings had been demolished, a plan of 1782 showing the locations of three buildings, one described as a pigeon house, another the Mansion House, the latter converted out of the surviving monastic buildings located on the seaward side of the church. Of these buildings only the prior's lodgings remains at the junction of Church Street and the Bayle, although it is likely that other masonry buildings forming part of this medieval monastic complex survive fossilized in later structures on the Bayle.

The medieval church itself also survives, although altered, together with a few twelfth century grave markers rebuilt into one of the churchyard walls.

The confirmation charter of 1137 is the earliest record of the presence of a castle at Folkestone. It was of course a retrospective grant and description and this suggests that the real reason for the monks removing to a new site was the desire of the Lord of Folkestone to fortify the headland at a time when the country was in upheaval during the civil war between Matilda and King Stephen in the 1130s. Investigations on the south-western edge of the inner Bayle in 1981 recorded a wide ditch, probably forming the southern edge of these defensive works. The ditch, later backfilled in a single episode from the slighting of an internal bank, contained pottery dating no later than 1125. From this date this fortified place probably became the seigniorial residence of the Lord of Folkestone. For a brief time in May 1216 it accommodated King John. On his departure the coast was raided by French who left the harbour and town in a dilapidated condition. The Bayle was probably the location of a building mentioned in 1263, described as being surrounded by a stone wall containing a dovecot and garden. There are a few references to the castle in the fourteenth century. In 1377 an order went out to John de Clynton, then Lord of Folkestone,

'to repair with his household to Folkestone castle by him held near the sea and there abide with power of men at arms, armed men and archers in his company sufficient to defend the same.'

In its present layout the topography of the Bayle has retained much of its medieval character, although the inner Bayle, the probable site of the early-mid Saxon monasteries and late eleventh century priory and then a fortified manorial residence or castle, was later remodelled as the site of a coastal battery in the eighteenth century, then as a coastguard station in the mid nineteenth century. I do not intend here to make a detailed survey of the sixteenth to nineteenth century development of the Bayle principally because I have not had the opportunity to study it in any detail. It is clear however from the 1782 town plan that many of the buildings extant then have been replaced by early-later nineteenth century brick residential properties but that much remains of the fabric of that period at 1 The Priory though to the Red Lion and in the basements of the properties along the north-west side of the Bayle.

I will close with a few comments and questions about the Bayle. The talk this evening was for the benefit of the members of the Bayle Residents Association to set in context and explain the work that the Folkestone A Town Unearthed project is currently undertaking. With this project an opportunity has arisen to look again at the archaeology and history of the Bayle. Work commenced on the excavation of five archaeological test pits a few weeks ago. One remains to be completed. The project is committed to excavating a further 35 through to April 2012 so there is clearly an urgent need to identify sites on the Bayle that could usefully be explored. As has been seen there is also a need to understand the nature of Roman occupation and activity on the Bayle, in short were there any masonry buildings? There is also a need to recover more evidence for the mid-late Saxon periods. How much of the early monastic communities survive? Survey of the existing cliff edge may help with this. One key feature from the archaeological investigations undertaken so far is that there is consistent and good survival of eleventh to twelfth century features and deposits across the Bayle.

The investigations undertaken recently to the rear of 20 Bayle recorded intact undisturbed deposits of this date. This is an important period for the area, a period when the monastic community was refounded, then removed to a new site and there was a change from the ecclesiastical to the seigniorial use of the area as a fortified residence. Equally there is a need to carry out a much more detailed study of the Bayle from the fifteenth century using historical sources and map regression analysis, as well as surveying the Bayle as it is today, identifying surviving late medieval, sixteenth century and later structures. It is unlikely that a similar opportunity to look at the history and archaeology will happen again in the foreseeable future so the support and interest of the residents of the Bayle is vital.

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