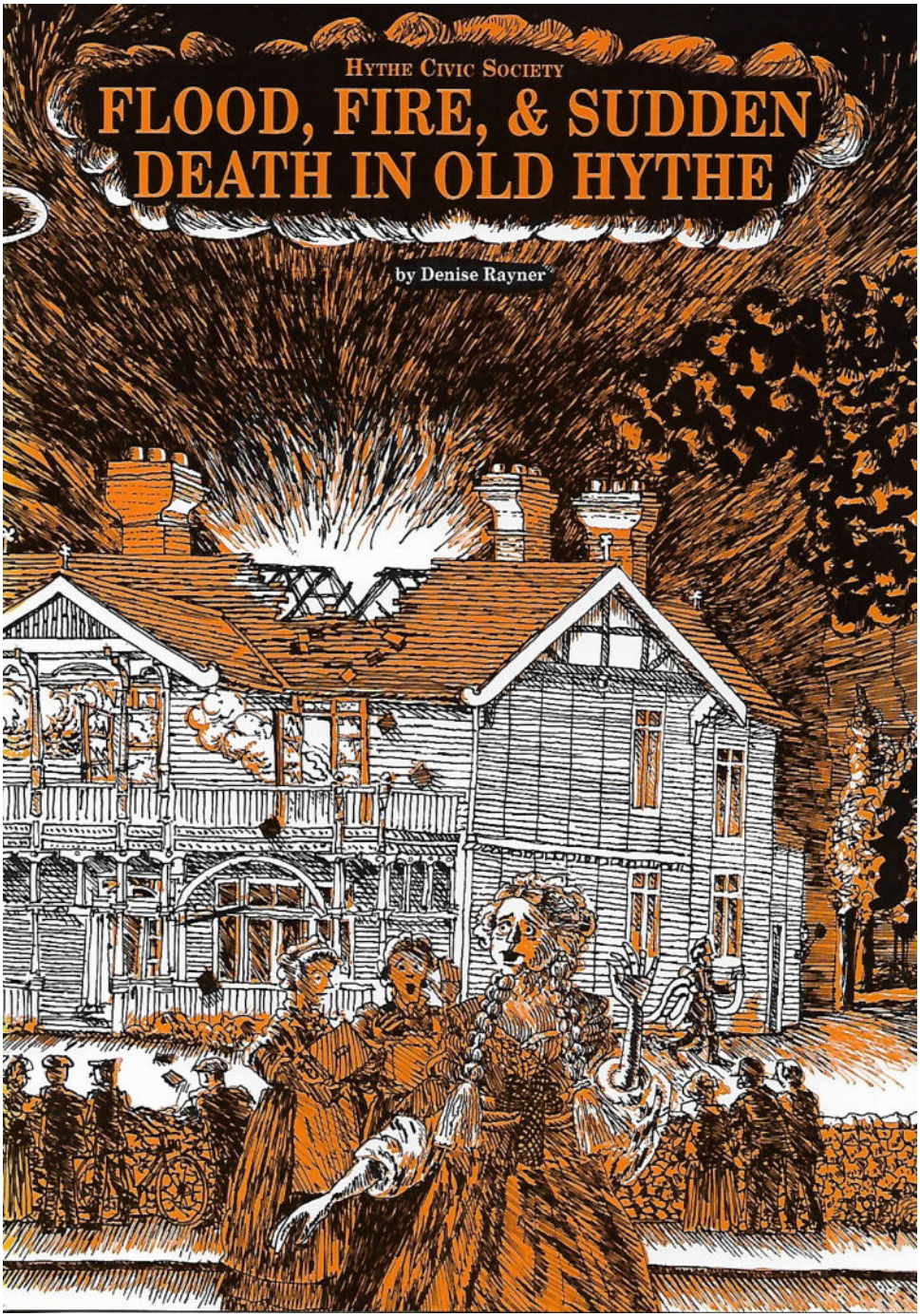
Hythe Civic Society
FLOOD, FIRE, & SUDDEN DEATH IN OLD HYTHE
by Denise Rayner

In recent centuries at least, Hythe has been spared any major disaster. But here are some stories from the past that would still make headlines today. The earliest took place nearly four centuries ago; the most recent happened just before the outbreak of World War II, when the town prided itself on combining a modern outlook with old-world charm.

Not all the stories come from newspapers: some are to be found in the Hythe Town Archives. But this book is, in the main, an affectionate tribute to local papers, from one whose parents both started their working lives on *The Hythe Reporter* – the old Ha'penny Rag.

A list of **Acknowledgments and Sources** will be found inside the cover at the back.

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Cover picture:
Mrs. Eleanor Davison's house in Seabrook Road in 1923. The conflagration and its dire consequences are told on pages 28-30.

# FLOOD, FIRE, AND SUDDEN DEATH

**Some Calamitous Happenings in Old Hythe**

by Denise Rayner

Designed and illustrated
by Rufus Segar

Dedicated to
**Edward Palmer**
Founder and Editor
of
*The Hythe Reporter*
from 1890
until his death in 1927
A true Gentleman
of the Press

Published by
HYTHE CIVIC SOCIETY
Hythe, Kent

## A Guide to the Calamities

## FLOOD
page 6



## FIRE
page13



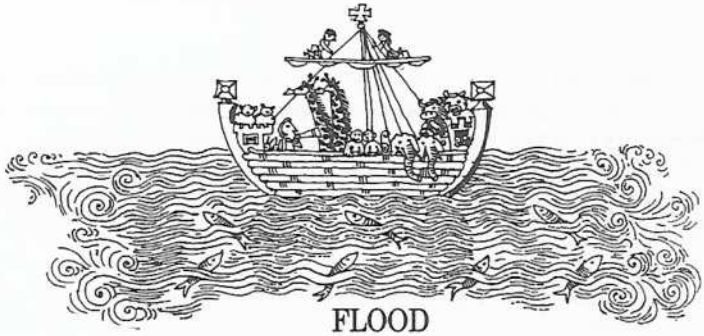
## SUDDEN DEATH
page 33

PHOTOGRAPHS AND PICTURES





INDEX OF MAYORS AND MURDERERS, HEROES AND VILLAINS AND VICTIMS AND ALL OTHERS MENTIONED



# FLOOD

HYTHE: WHERE THE COUNTRY MEETS THE SEA
Town Guides, 1960s – 1980s

The sea is both a friend and an enemy of Hythe. It has provided a living for many of the townsfolk: as fishermen, and in catering for visitors in the days when the town was a watering-place popular among holidaymakers seeking the peace of the countryside combined with the pleasures of the seaside. It helped to create the town below the hills. But from time to time the sea tries to take back what it once owned.

The name of the town derives from "hyth", the Old English word for a landing-place, a harbour, a creek. In the fifth century this took the form of a lagoon stretching from the present eastern boundary at Seabrook to West Hythe. Shingle banks protected it from the sea; the inlet was between Stade Street and Twiss Road.

Over the centuries the lagoon gradually silted up: soil was washed down from the high ground, and the deep water at the foot of the hills became shallower. At the same time, the tides brought more shingle along the foreshore, narrowing the harbour mouth.

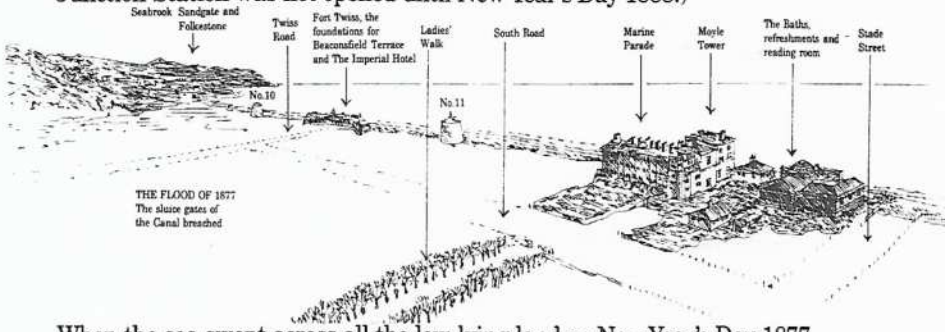
As the water receded the population spread out from the hillside, and Hythe began to take up its present situation. The very existence of the harbour was threatened; and from the 15th century at least it was kept open only by well-organised digging. The reclamation of Romney Marsh added to the problem, as this reduced the scouring effect of the tide as it ebbed from the saltings.

By the reign of Queen Elizabeth I the harbour had virtually ceased to exist.

In 1555, John Knight inned (that is, reclaimed from the sea) some of the land between town and sea, and inning was continued in the following

century. Traces of Sir William's Wall, a bank of soil built by Sir William Honywood in the late 17th century, can still be seen near the Hotel Imperial. The newly-gained land became Corporation property, such as the present Recreation Ground, and was usually leased for grazing.

So the little town of Hythe survived, and gradually began to thrive. At the start of the 19th century the Royal Military Canal was dug and the Martello Towers were built. The School of Musketry arrived in 1853; a high-class bathing establishment was built on the sea front in the following year; the new Coastguard Station was completed in 1861. Even the railway came slightly nearer to the town, in the form of a branch line from east of Westenhanger Station to Hythe and Seabrook, in 1874. ( Sandling Junction Station was not opened until New Year's Day 1888.)




When the sea swept across all the low-lying land on New Year's Day 1877, there was much more to be done than just move a few sheep, cattle and horses to the higher ground.

A gale sprang up about eight o'clock in the morning; the wind gradually veered round to the south-west and reached almost hurricane force. High tide was around noon. From Fort Sutherland on the Ranges to Sandgate there was little to stop the sea except for a few houses on Marine Parade.

Stade Street was the main road from the sea, and the water poured down this as far as the High Street. All available boats were brought into service as the water level quickly rose in the houses south of the Canal. The occupants of the Hope Inn had to be rescued from their upstairs windows.

The Ladies' Walk Bridge, then a narrow wooden footbridge, was swept along to Stade Street. More serious was the loss of Scanlon's

Bridge, better known as Hang Gallows Bridge, which was an important carriageway. Stade Street Bridge had been pulled down and rebuilt only the previous summer, when it was widened from 18 to 30 feet [approximately 6 to 10 metres]; now it was badly damaged. The sea came over the Duke's Head Bridge as far as the Brewery on the north side of Market Square (now Red Lion Square). Some High Street shops had up to three feet [nearly one metre] of water in their lower rooms, particularly the older ones where customers went down a few steps into the shop.

The Borough Surveyor and the Police Superintendent were afterwards praised for their efforts to rescue people from their flooded homes. There were many small houses south of the Canal, and the inhabitants were reluctant to abandon their few possessions; in some cases they had no upstairs rooms where they could remove things to safety. By contrast, the occupants of the large houses on the Parade (mostly lodging-houses) were able to get some of their furniture upstairs, although at least two of the houses were badly damaged.

Nearly 50 years later, an old resident recalled from his own memories and from stories he had heard from others there at the time some of the events of 1877.

He claimed that workmen repairing Twiss Groyne had dug out too much of the beach nearby in order to make concrete; this practice seems to have been continued until fairly recent times. So at this point, close to Fort Twiss, there was little to stop the surge of the sea. (The Hotel Imperial was not completed until 1880.) The present Twiss Road was then only a trackway leading to the small wooden Bell Bridge, and the water quickly spread out on both sides, to the westward joining that which had come over from the Stade Street direction.

The strong winds had brought a flock of grey geese into the area, and two young sportsmen had just succeeded in shooting one south of the Canal when they had to run for their lives. They took off their clothes, bundled them up (with the goose), and tried to swim the flooded Canal; luckily they were washed ashore at Bell Bridge. The goose was afterwards stuffed, and was on display for a time in the Town Hall.

The sea was at full height for about three hours. The Bell Bridge went, to the annoyance of numbers of rats nesting there; some of them found a barrel to climb on, but were soon swept into the Canal and drowned. An old flat-bottomed boat moored nearby, used for weeding the

Canal, was later found several miles away in a field in Romney Marsh.

At the Hope Inn, the Misses Esther and Emma Cloake had been preparing dinner. As they and Mrs. Sophia Cloake, the licensee, made for the upstairs rooms, the boiler complete with their dinner floated along the street.

The water rose to within 18 inches [half a metre] of the top of the north bank of the Canal. As well as flowing over the bridges, some of it was forced up through the old sewers which still ran into the Canal, and thence into other streets. Marine Walk Street, East Street, Theatre Street, Mount Street, Rampart Road, lower Bank Street, and part of Chapel Street were all flooded. What saved the town from worse damage was the fact that the Canal had been almost empty: it took the water to the Marsh, where there was considerable damage and loss of sheep.

At the next quarterly meeting of Hythe Town Council, the Town Clerk gave details of the depth of the water at different parts of the town. Moyle Tower, on the Parade, 5 feet 6 inches; the Baths, 1 foot; Fort Twiss houses, 4 feet 6 inches; Stade Street opposite to and in the Hope Inn, 5 feet 9 inches; Stade Street at the end of Windmill Street, 4 feet; half-way up Bank Street, 2 feet; Nelson's Head Inn, 1 foot; High Street opposite Mr. Mackeson's (west end), 1 foot 6 inches. [A range of 1.75 to 0.3 metres.]

The cost of the damage was estimated at £600. (At this time a two-bedroomed house could be bought for £250 – and a farm labourer earned 65 pence a week.)

At least on this occasion no lives were lost. Because the flooding occurred during daylight hours, people had time to escape, and most of the sheep, cattle and horses were saved. But in a less-severe flood just over a year earlier, it had been the Borough Surveyor himself who was drowned.

Mr. Allen Gravener, who was in his late 60s, had been appointed Surveyor only a short while before. He was a native of Hythe, a mason by trade. It was the usual practice at that time to appoint someone (part-time) with a good working knowledge of local conditions. At a salary of £5 a year, academic qualifications could not be expected. When the sea came over in November 1875, his appointment had just been renewed for the coming year.

In the words of a contemporary writer: " The sea in the bay rose to an immense height during Sunday morning, and at about 12 o'clock vast quantities of water came over the beach and the Marine Parade, completely inundating the land lying between the town and the sea side, several hundred acres being between two and three feet under water. The houses on the Marine Parade were completely isolated, the only accommodation being by boat for some time. A great deal of damage has been done to the Parade and Twiss Fort."

Mr. Gravener spent the morning watching the action of the sea on the sea wall, no doubt anxious to make a success of his new job. He then decided to return to the town, probably by way of St.Leonard's Road, then only partly built up. There was a deep channel of water between the foreshore and the road, and it seems that he chose to walk along the foreshore, against his companions' advice.

He had nearly reached Tower No.13 (which is now a private house) when he was seen to stagger as the waves and the wind caught him. Then another wave sent him into the channel.

He struggled to regain land, but the beach was almost perpendicular at this point. A number of onlookers in Park Field saw his vain attempts, but no-one was near enough to help him. Then a Coastguardsman came running from the nearby Station, plunged into the water, and dragged Mr. Gravener up the beach, helped by the crew of the Coastguard galley, who had just managed to launch their boat.

At Park Field (now the Cobden Road area) two doctors did their best to revive him, but he was dead.

Mrs. Mary Gravener, his widow, was later presented with a copy of the Town Council resolution regretting his death and expressing their sympathy, and the sum of £5.

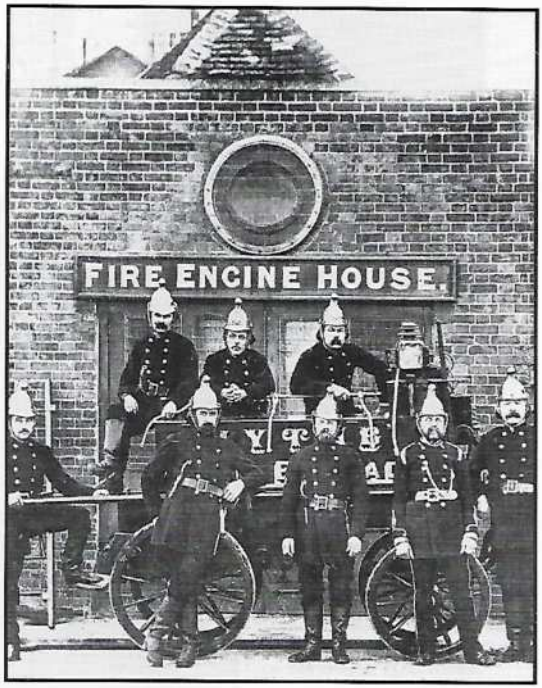
Twentieth-century Hythe has seen flooding and the breaching of the sea wall – in 1913, £10,000-worth of damage was caused, mainly to West Parade – but nothing so severe as the inundation of 1877. Nevertheless, those people who live on the sea front and along the approach roads take particular notice of the weather forecasts at certain times of the year, and make sure that the sandbags are filled and stacked in readiness for the occasions when the sea and the shingle try yet again to invade their homes.

The Flood of 1877, seen from the north end of Ladies' Walk.

*Photo January 1877*

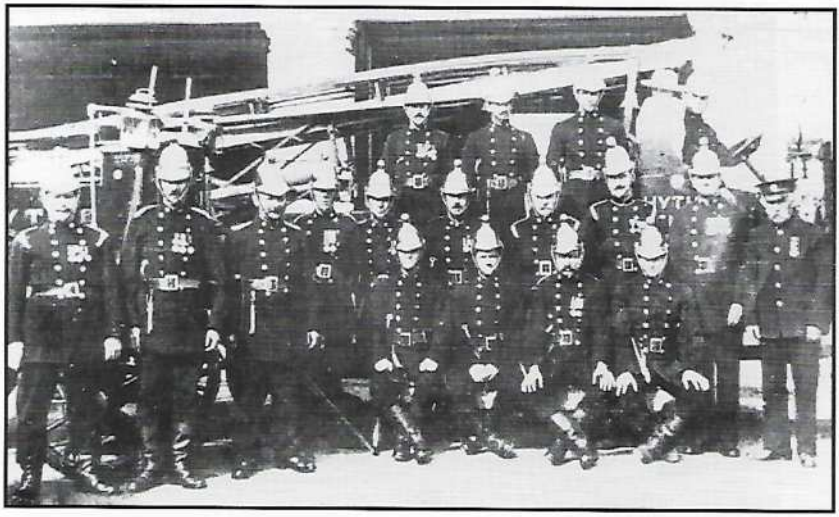
Ladies' Walk Bridge before the 1877 Flood

*Photo circa 1870*




Half of the men of the Hythe Volunteer Fire Brigade in the 1890s. The Engine House shown was built in 1885 in Portland Road on the site of the old Gasworks. The brass helmets were issued in 1891.

The Volunteer Fire Brigade in 1925 in front of the new Fire Station built on the site of the 1885 Engine House in 1925. The building is now the Hythe Garage. The Fire Station is now in Wakefield Way.



# FIRE

ALARUMS AND EXCURSIONS
Stage direction, Elizabethan and Jacobean drama

Mediæval Hythe was virtually destroyed by fire on at least one occasion – possibly twice. A specific date is given: 3rd (or possibly 23rd) May, 1400, but on whose authority is unknown. This would place the event in the reign of Henry IV; but other reigns mentioned are those of Edward II, Edward III, and Richard II. Whatever the date, it is said that 200 houses were burnt, which must have accounted for most of the town. After fire, possibly plague, and the loss of five ships with 100 men at sea, the townspeople petitioned to be allowed to abandon the town. Fortunately Henry IV refused.

Hythe can boast of having the oldest fire brigade in Kent: it was founded in 1802. About 30 years later, for reasons now unknown, it split into two: The Scot and Lot Fire Engine Association and The Corporation Fire Engine Brigade. (Scot and lot was an old municipal tax, where the amount levied depended on a person's wealth; this suggests how the Association may have been financed.) The two organisations were reunited around 1860, and in 1866 adopted the name of Hythe Volunteer Fire Brigade. A new engine was bought at a cost of £173 3s.0d. [£173.15], the money being raised by public subscription, including £25 from Hythe Corporation and 10 guineas [£10.50] each from Mr. H.B. Mackeson, Colonel and Mrs. Deedes, and Baron Rothschild, M.P. for Hythe.

It was obviously a splendid machine. According to the Brigade's

records: " The Paxton Fire Engine was purchased in May, 1866, from Messrs. Merryweather and Sons, of London. It obtained the prize medal at the Dublin Exhibition in 1865, and was kept by the Commissioners until it closed, for their use in the building in case of emergency. It is capable of discharging 100 gallons per minute to a height of 120 feet. It is the latest and best of its kind."

The old machine, bought 30 years earlier, was handed over to Mr. Mackeson for use at the Brewery.

In the 19th century Hythe had an average of two fires a year. Whether by good fortune or the efficiency of the Brigade, there were no disasters such as the one that destroyed a large part of Wye in 1889. Ashford, Gravesend and Chatham each suffered three serious fires during the century.

On the front of the Swan Hotel there can still be seen the sign of the " Sun", dating from the days when a fire would be tackled only if the householder had insured his premises with the appropriate company. In 1904 the Mayor (J. J. Jeal) noticed a "Britannia" insurance plate which he estimated to be 100 years old on a building in Prospect Place, and gave orders for it to be removed and put in the Museum. While this was being done, the tenant came by and called the Mayor a cad for stealing his property; but the Mayor won the argument by pointing out that the building belonged to the town of Hythe, and the man's tenancy had in fact expired. (This plate has now been lost.)

At the end of last century there could be seen on the wall by the Town Hall two relics of earlier fire-fighting days: a heavy ladder with 45 rungs, and an enormous fire hook, used for pulling down burning buildings to prevent the spread of fire.

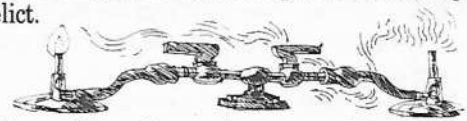
No doubt the new Hythe Brigade, whatever name it went under at the time, was present when the stables at the White Hart caught fire in 1806. The *British Press* of 25th June, 1806, describes what happened:

" On Saturday afternoon the Archbishop of Canterbury arrived at the White Hart Inn, Hythe, in his coach and six fine black horses. Between 10 and 11 at night the stable was discovered to be on fire, when, notwithstanding every exertion was made to move them, two of those beautiful animals

were burnt to death, and another so badly burnt that it was obliged to be killed. A fourth was very much scorched, but is now alive and is thought will recover; the other two escaped with little or no injury."

Mills have always presented a fire risk, the friction of the machinery combining with the inflammability of the flour dust; the danger is greater for windmills than for watermills. Seabrook Mill, near the bottom of Horn Street, was completely destroyed by fire in 1859. A passing police constable noticed the interior on fire in the early hours of the morning, and despite the efforts of three fire engines and a large number of soldiers from Shorncliffe, the mill and part of the adjoining house were burnt out. Fortunately the buildings and their contents were insured: businessmen were aware of the need for this, but poor families often could not afford the extra expense.

This mill was worked by the stream called the Seabrook. The mill house is still standing. Though a listed building, it is boarded up and appears almost derelict.



In 1863, gas was still something of a novelty to many Hythe people, even though it had come to the town 20 years earlier. So two employees of Hythe and Sandgate Gas and Coke Company might have been forgiven for not remembering that it was unwise to look for a leak with a naked flame. They were cleaning out one of the purifiers when they smelt an escape of gas, and, without thinking, they took a light to find the source of the trouble.

Unfortunately they had not fully closed the valve which prevented the gas returning from the holders to the purifier before they started cleaning it. The equipment immediately went up in flames, and all the gas in one of the holders (about 5,000 cubic feet [140 cubic metres] ) was consumed, and the room itself was burnt out. The Gasworks was then in Portland Road, and so the firemen were able to use water from the Canal to save the rest of the premises. One of the workmen had both arms badly burnt; the other escaped with only the loss of his whiskers and eyebrows.

A fire which could have had disastrous consequences in Stade Street occurred in 1866. William Hole, who was in his 40s, appears to have been more prosperous than the average Hythe fisherman of the period. In the yard adjacent to his house (near the present Arthur Road) were a new brick and slated building used as a stable, with herring-hang attached, and a large wooden shed built against it. He awoke one midnight to find these buildings a mass of flames. Fortunately he kept his head, and after arousing his neighbours and rushing into the town to call out the Fire Brigade, he managed to isolate the fire by pulling down the burning buildings.

Eight firemen and three officers turned out promptly: this was probably their first opportunity to use the new engine. The School of Musketry fire engine also arrived, with about 40 men. Stade Street's water main was only two inches [five centimetres] in diameter, and could certainly not cope with a major fire. It was found possible to take some water from the sea, and four nearby wells helped out the meagre Corporation supply; even so, there was insufficient water to keep the hoses working fully. The firefighters were able to save all the houses, but had to let the fire burn itself out.

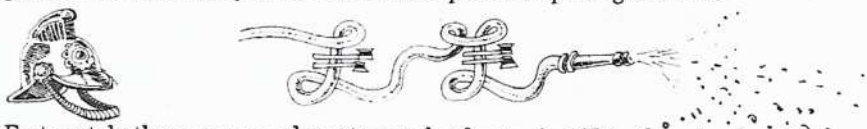
William Hole lost all his outbuildings and their contents: van, cart, sets of harness, fishing nets and other equipment, farm machinery – and his black mare. The fire was so sudden and fierce that "the horse died where it lay, apparently without a struggle, the flesh being burnt to a cinder, and in some places even the bones were destroyed." The total cost of the damage was between £500 and £600 – a sum equivalent to the cost of two houses. Mr. Hole was not fully insured.

The old Hythe Volunteer Fire Brigade, despite horse-drawn, manually-operated equipment, through the enthusiasm and dedication of its members had a reputation for efficiency. However, their efforts were often hindered by lack of water. In 1878 the Brigade took part in a torchlight procession in honour of the Mayoral banquet. A tableau entitled " The Wants of Hythe" included a plea for a uniform for the firemen. About half an hour later there was a small fire in Chapel Street. A man was rescued, but the fire had to be put out with buckets of water, as the Brigade had no access to the mains.

When the matter was raised at the next Council meeting, it was stated that keys were available for turning on the water, " but it was not the keys they wanted, so much as a man who understood how to turn on the water, as the man engaged during the day lived so far from the spot." A request by the

firemen to have the water left on at night was rejected, the Town Clerk explaining that this had been discontinued because so much water was wasted – probably from leaking mains rather than from human carelessness.

A uniform was achieved in 1881. The men had to wait another ten years for their splendid brass helmets, and even then some townsfolk complained that the money should have been spent on replacing old hoses.



Fortunately there was an adequate supply of water in 1884, otherwise the Swan Hotel and neighbouring buildings in the High Street might have gone up in flames.

In Bartholomew Street, just behind the Swan, stood three old cottages built mainly of wood. In the early hours of a Sunday morning, Mrs. Grace Riddington, who lived in the middle one with her gardener husband Thomas, their three children, and her old father, was awakened by the striking of the Church clock. Hearing an unfamiliar noise, she went downstairs and found the front room full of flames.

She rushed upstairs and called a warning to her father, Hammonden Vidgeon, who was nearly 80, and heard him reply, "All right, I'll be there in a moment." Her husband climbed out of a window and she passed the children to him. Then she attempted to go back to her father, but the flames forced her to escape through the window.

Their next-door neighbour, aroused by the cry of "Fire!", tried to force the front door and reach the old man, without success. Seeing the flames spreading rapidly, he made sure that his own wife and children (they had six sons and a daughter) were safely out. He then rescued his doe rabbit with her litter of eight, and attempted to save some clothes and furniture.

A waiter at the Swan Hotel had called the Fire Brigade; the Brewery engine was also brought along. Despite a good supply of water and the efficiency of the firemen, with other men helping to work the pumps, the one building was completely burnt out, another partly destroyed, and the third badly damaged.

Old Mr. Vidgeon was found dead in the attic where he had slept. A candlestick was still in his hand, showing that he had attempted to escape. The cause of the fire remained unknown, as there was no lamp, and the fire in the grate had been extinguished long before the family went to bed.

The owners of two of the houses had insured their property; the third had omitted to do so. However, none of the tenants had insured the contents, and the Riddington family had escaped "with hardly a particle of clothing on."

The Mayor attended the inquest, and announced that he had opened a subscription list to replace the furniture and other possessions that had been lost. Typically, the town gave generous support.

The following year, Hythe Volunteer Fire Brigade asked the Council to provide a proper engine house; they also pointed out that there was nowhere for the men to drill in winter. The Council agreed to build a house on the site of the old Gasworks in Portland Road, and only five months later, in July 1885, the Brigade moved in. (The 1925 Fire Station, which is still standing, was built on the same site.)

An example of speed and efficiency was provided in 1890 when a fire broke out in the wooden paraffin store at the rear of R. & A. Price, grocers, in the High Street (now Nos. 49 and 51, opposite Bank Street), after someone dropped a lighted match. Hythe Fire Brigade received the call at 7.10pm, and arrived in seven minutes. The engines from the Brewery and the School of Musketry also came to help. Meanwhile, a telegram was sent to Sandgate Volunteer Fire Brigade, who arrived in 20 minutes; there was a slight delay as the men were out on a practice drill at the time. The hydrant at the back of Great Conduit Street gave "a splendid supply" of water, and the fire was out, with very little damage, in a quarter of an hour.

Hythe Volunteer Fire Brigade was originally supported by contributions; then, around the turn of the century, the Council decided to grant an annual subsidy of £25. During the summer months the men went on "busmen's holidays" to other towns to study the water supplies there. Sometimes competitions with other local volunteer brigades were held on the Cricket Ground. A typical one involved Turn-Out Drill for an officer and six men. The men lay down in the pavilion without tunics, helmets and belts. On the given signal, they had to dress completely; run 20 yards to the engine; drag it 20 yards, fix two lengths of suction and hose, and put the engine in working order; finally, put out a fire at the top of a pole.

As one of their monthly drills, the Hythe Brigade, with the Brewery Fire Brigade, inspected and tested all ponds and streams around Newingreen, Hillhurst and Sandling; then they drilled together at Slaybrook. The report stated: "Unfortunately many places were found to have a poor supply of water, so that in case of a fire nothing much could be done to save property by that means."

In 1892 Hythe obtained a new escape ladder, which could be worked by one man simply by turning a wheel to extend it. Its maximum height of 35 feet [a little under 11 metres] was "enough to reach the highest building in Hythe." Each member of the Brigade was given an enamelled iron tablet with FIREMAN in blue letters on white, to be fixed on his house in a conspicuous position.

At the 94th annual dinner in 1896, the Captain, Mr. J.V. Cobb, said that the men were sadly in need of undress uniform: at a recent fire, they were greatly inconvenienced because their uniforms had shrunk and hardly kept them warm. The appliances were in good order, and they had as much hose as they could carry. Now, they needed the town to provide a constant water supply. Two years later, the Mayor had to admit that the water supply was in worse condition than at any time during the last 20 years.

A disadvantage of living outside the town was shown up in 1902, when the house being built for Mr. A.C. Leney, a Dover brewer, was badly damaged by fire. This was Garden House, near Croft's Walks and overlooking the American Gardens at Saltwood.

The house was almost completed: it was built in an old French style, with thatched roof and "really elegant" chimneys. Hythe Fire Brigade found on arrival that the only water was 20 feet from the surface in a well. They had only a manual engine, and there would be few bystanders to help the men work the pump. Sandgate Brigade was sent for, and the two brigades ran their hoses to the American Gardens. Folkestone Brigade (Corporation funded) then arrived with superior equipment. But it was still two hours after the outbreak of the fire that a proper supply of water could be obtained, and although much of the house was saved, the interior was burnt out.

The cost of the damage was estimated at £4,000 – an enormous sum at that period. A 60-year-old tramp who tried to turn the disaster to his own advantage found himself before Hythe Magistrates on a charge of

arson. He called at Leney's Brewery in Dover to ask for a new coat and shirt, claiming that he had been sleeping under a hedge near the building, and that his clothes were burnt when he helped put the fire out. He was discharged when it was proved that he had been in the Each End Hill Union ( Elham Workhouse at Etchinghill) at the time.

At the next annual dinner, the Captain, Councillor James Ashdown, emphasised the need for a "steamer": the water would be pumped by steam instead of by hand. Water could thus be obtained from a greater distance – essential for fire-fighting at any of the mansions in the neighbourhood. This was demonstrated at the annual inspection in the summer of 1903. The effectiveness of the manual engine depended greatly on the freshness of the men operating the pump, and some of the Hythe mains were too small for an adequate stream of water to be obtained by this means. When the Hythe engine was joined by Folkestone Fire Brigade's steam engine at the wharf by the old Cattle Market (Duke's Head Bridge), the latter was found to be far superior, providing water to a height of 30-40 feet [11 metres].

One dissentient, however, said there was no need for a new engine as Hythe had no tall buildings. If country houses needed one, the gentlemen and residents should pay for it themselves.

By the end of 1904 the Brigade had raised by subscription the full £260 needed, and the new steam engine was christened *Speedwell* by the Mayoress, Mrs. Thomas Amos, in April 1905. (The name was said to be taken from that of a Royal Navy gunboat.) Captain Ashdown's wife then lit the fire in the engine. (At that time, £300 would have bought a two-bedroomed house.)

*Speedwell* was a Shand-Mason "Double Vertical" requiring a pair of horses to draw (or it could be drawn by hand), and carried eight men plus the driver. Its capacity was 300 gallons per minute, sending a one-inch jet 150 feet [about 45 metres]. It was fitted with all the latest improvements, including a safety catch to release the horses quickly in case of an accident. Everyone was delighted with it at the trial which followed its christening. (*Speedwell* is now at Chatham Maritime Museum.)

One problem raised by a newcomer to the town was: how to summon the Brigade, since nobody lived at the Fire Station. The Captain, James Ashdown, recommended sending a messenger or telephoning to his premises at 7 High Street (phone 4y3) during the day. The police would know what to do in case of a call at night.


Above. The first appearance of *Speedwell* on the bank of the Royal Military Canal near Duke's Head Bridge in 1905.

The Sportsman Inn, June 1907. Hythe Picture Palace was built on the site in 1911. The Arcade, which replaced this in 1928, was destroyed by a bomb in 1940. Now Oxted Linen Supply and Dabin & Sons, the greengrocers, in the High Street.

The *Speedwell* in full harness, trotting west down the High Street. Griggs and Henry Lee's on the right, Bushell's on the left. Circa 1906.

*The Little Covent Garden,* Arthur Cornell's shop in 1910. Now Locke's the clock, watch and camera mender, 123 high Street.

However, this was not always a straightforward matter. Hythe Volunteer Fire Brigade had to cover a wide rural area. Folkestone Fire Brigade, being paid for out of the town's rates, was not allowed to attend fires outside the town without permission first being obtained from the appointed representative of Folkestone Town Council. In 1912 Hythe was called out to deal with a farm fire at Lyminge. The call was first received at Hythe Railway Station, who sent it to the Hotel Imperial by the private wire (the only one from the Station); the Hotel transmitted the message to Mr. Ashdown's shop. As yet, few private houses in the town had telephones, and when in 1916 a lady living in North Road found her kitchen on fire, she had to run down to the town waving a hand-rattle. Fortunately she met a policeman en route.

The firemen themselves were summoned by the firing of a maroon outside the Fire Station: this was a large rocket-type firework, which was flung high into the air, where it exploded with a bang that could be heard all over the town. In earlier times, runners, or messenger boys, were used. Two maroons called out the lifeboat. Few townspeople objected to the noise, as a fire or a lifeboat-launching was guaranteed to attract a crowd of onlookers.


High Street fires, with the old buildings crowded close together, were always potentially serious. In 1907, the Sportsman Inn, opposite Theatre Street, was burnt out. The fire started late on a Sunday night when the landlord and his wife were away, and it was soon evident that the Brigade's main task was to stop the fire from spreading to adjoining shops. This was a particularly difficult job, and involved climbing on walls, sheds and neighbouring roofs. Several firemen had a narrow escape when the Sportsman's roof, from which they were fighting the flames, collapsed. One of the firemen climbed into the burning building through a window to extinguish flames coming from a broken gas pipe. Despite the lateness of the hour, townsfolk turned out to help people living nearby to rescue their belongings – and also to enjoy the spectacle.

The disadvantage of living in the country was again shown up a few weeks later when a newly-erected mansion at Lympne belonging to Mr. W.H. Upjohn, K.C., caught fire early one Sunday morning and was burnt to the ground; the building would have been completed in a few days. The site foreman had to cycle to Hythe to summon the Brigade; the only water, in a well, was inaccessible; the hoses would not reach to the Canal. The house, containing 32 rooms, was constructed mainly of oak timber. In this case, arson was suspected.

1910 was a bad year for fires. In April, *The Little Covent Garden*, a fruiterer's and greengrocer's belonging to Mr. Arthur Cornell, almost opposite St.John's Hospital in the High Street, was gutted by a fire which apparently started in the coal cupboard. The fire was first noticed by the butcher next door, who saw smoke coming into his shop. Mrs. Cornell was dressing the shop window at the time, from outside, and was overcome by smoke when she rushed upstairs to fetch insurance and other documents. She was rescued by a neighbour.

The time being late afternoon, a very large crowd gathered in the High Street. Many more people assembled in Dental Street, which was not then built on, and watched from the steep grassy banks. The neighbouring shops were damaged by fire, smoke and water, and the Council placed a demolition order on Cornell's shop. This was later cancelled, and the building remains, now being occupied by Locke's of Hythe.

Six months later there was a serious fire at Mr. F. Beaney's fishmonger's and fruiterer's shop, just west of the present Boots. Apparently Mr. Beaney's mother was crossing the landing with a lighted paraffin lamp in her hand when she tripped; the lamp was broken, and the blazing oil ran across the landing and down the stairs. Another resident rescued her and two children, and then tried to save the contents of the building. The shop itself was almost undamaged, but the upper floors and the back of the building were gutted.

As with the Sportsman fire, the Brigade did not need to use the manual or the steamer, since there were three hydrants close by. However, a high wind made the firemen's work very difficult, but they were able to prevent damage to adjacent buildings. The poor woman who caused the fire could not be persuaded to leave the scene, insisting upon remaining in the stables at the back until a policeman carried her away.

Although none of the inhabitants was injured, the fire had a tragic sequel. Sandgate Brigade had been called on to help, and in Seabrook Road their horse-drawn vehicle slowed down so that some of the men could be transferred to a motor coach travelling towards Hythe, to lighten the load. Somehow one of them, a fireman with nearly 25 years' experience, slipped, and his leg was struck by the wheel of the motor coach; it had to be amputated.

At a meeting of Hythe Town Council shortly afterwards, there was some criticism of the way the fire was tackled. The crowds had hindered the Brigade. Some members of the public, trying to help, had taken hold of two lengths of hose and run them the wrong way. The person who first went to call out the Brigade did not stop to say where the fire was. The Captain, Councillor Ashdown, bitterly pointed out that Hythe could not afford to pay £600 a year for its Fire Brigade, as Folkestone did.

Cinemagoers fresh from the delights of a Saturday night at Hythe Picture Palace (Admission: 1/-, 6d and 3d. Continuous performance 3.30 to 10pm. " In the interest of public health the Hall is cleansed daily with Jeyes' Fluid") might have been forgiven for thinking that the fire at the Gasworks in 1913 was a show put on for their entertainment. But though it should have provided high drama, in fact it needed only Mack Sennett and Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle to transform it into one of the new Keystone Comedies.

The sound of the maroon, even around midnight, was guaranteed to bring out the onlookers, and the scene was truly dramatic. The two gasholders, standing out against the night sky near the fishermen's beach, held a maximum of over 170,000 cubic feet [5,000 cubic metres] of gas. The meter house only a few yards away was well alight: the fire had started in the "governor," a kind of miniature gasometer that governed the supply to the

service pipes. In fact there was no risk of an explosion; but the prospect of one did serve to keep the crowds out of the way of the firefighters.

While the audience waited for the Fire Brigade to come galloping along, the stokers on duty, helped by one of the fishermen, struggled with buckets of water and damp cloths to keep the service pipes from melting. But behind the scenes a fine collection of mishaps was accumulating, and when the Council met afterwards to discuss what had gone wrong, it was difficult to decide what to complain of first.

The fire had been discovered just before midnight, and no member of the Fire Brigade had the telephone installed at his home; nor had the Corporation foreman, who was a supernumerary member and fired the maroon. Even the newly-opened Hythe Police Station had no telephone: it had been decided that one at Seabrook Police Station was sufficient. The Fire Station itself was not yet on the 'phone. The Brigade and the Post Office had not been able to agree on terms – or even on whether the Station was the best place to have it installed.

Alderman J. J. Jeal was particularly concerned about the plight of the young woman on duty at the Telephone Exchange when the call came through from the Gasworks. " He knew that the girl from the telephone office had to go out of the office, in such attire as she would be at that time of the night, and with her hair down at the back, expecting to find a policeman to give the information to, and she could not find a policeman or anybody, and had to go right through the High Street."

The hydrant at the end of St.Leonard's Road was at the extreme limit of the water supply from the town reservoir in North Road, and so the pressure was inadequate. The man whose job it was to open the valve to obtain better pressure from the Saltwood reservoir was fast asleep and did not hear the maroon. A hydrant near the burning shed was buried under earth and rubbish.

It was an exciting night for the onlookers, and little damage was done. The only casualty was the foreman stoker, who suffered a blistered arm.

By contrast, the fire which destroyed Dibgate Farm house, Blackhouse Hill, a few months later was grim tragedy.

The house was a large, rambling building, with a great deal of wood in its construction. The farm was Government property, situated just within the Hythe boundary, and was reached by a private road from Blackhouse

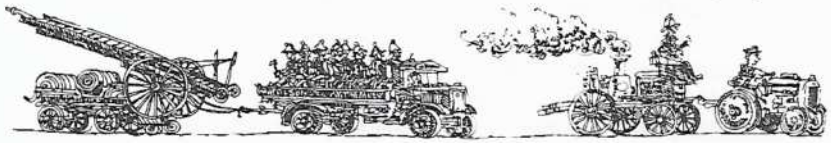
Hill; the house itself faced eastwards, having its back to the main road.

The tenant of the farm was Mr. Herbert Buckwell, who had taken it over from his brother four years earlier. Their father was the Reverend Leighton Buckwell, Vicar of Newington. A young man who was staying at the farm, Mr. Lionel Davison, suffered from petit mal (a form of epilepsy), and was also in the habit of smoking in bed. At the inquest, the Coroner suggested that he had probably fallen asleep and set fire to the bedclothes.

It was Mrs. Buckwell who discovered the fire about 5am, when she was awakened by the crying of their son, aged three months. When her husband went to investigate, he found Mr. Davison's room a mass of flames. It was obvious that nothing could be done to rescue the young man. All that the Buckwells could do was get the baby and their three-year-old daughter to safety, and try to salvage a few items of furniture while waiting for the Fire Brigade. A farm labourer had been sent off in the pony cart; he met a policeman on Blackhouse Hill, who summoned the Brigade. Five men passing by on their way to work from Cheriton managed to bring out some furniture from the ground floor.

It is difficult to visualise nowadays the problems faced by the Fire Brigade in actually getting to such a fire. Owing to the steepness of Blackhouse Hill, three horses were needed to pull the engine. Most of the firemen dismounted part-way up the hill and ran on ahead. On arrival at the farm (in a very creditable half-an-hour from the firing of the maroon), they were lucky to find two ponds to provide a good supply of water. However, by then nothing could be done to save the building. The young man's charred body, and a cigarette case bearing his initials, were later found among the ruins.

In spite of the isolated situation of the farm, the blaze attracted a sizeable audience, and many more visited the scene the following day.



It was World War I that gave Hythe Fire Brigade its first form of motorized transport. All reliable horses were commandeered by the Army, and although fortunately no major fires occurred during this period, the need for a substitute must have been very much in the minds of all concerned.

The solution was to use a motor tractor to draw the steamer, and Mackeson and Co. Ltd. offered the use of one of the Brewery lorries. A report of a small fire at Seabrook Lodge School in 1922 has the escape ladder being towed by the lorry and the hose cart by a taxi. Since there was always the possibility that the lorry might not be available in an emergency, the firemen were determined to have their own.

After unsuccessful trials with different types of machine, in June 1922 they obtained a Daimler motor engine for conversion into a tractor, and put it to the most severe test they could think of. " The trial was to ascertain if the motor could negotiate the hills around the town, and Blackhouse Hill was chosen as a stiff obstacle. The motor took the hill with ease, with a fully-loaded steamer and a complement of 17 men." When adapted, it would be capable of drawing not only the steamer but also the hoses and all other apparatus.

Unfortunately Hythe Volunteer Fire Brigade's fine record of service was tarnished in 1923 when *The Bungalow* in Seabrook Road was completely destroyed by fire. Not only was the Brigade accused of incompetence, but four of its members were later found guilty of theft.

Despite its name, *The Bungalow*, owned and occupied by Mrs. Eleanor Davison, a widow, was a large, detached, two-storey house on the north side of Seabrook Road, and was built mainly of wood. The fire, apparently caused by an electrical fault, started in the upper storey, and a strong south-westerly wind fanned the flames. The Hythe Brigade was helped by Sandgate, but nothing could be done to save the building.

The Hythe men did not take the steamer: with the improved water supply in the town, it was the practice to rely on hoses unless the call was to an outlying area. But Seabrook Road was to some extent out of the town, and there had earlier been complaints that the hydrants were on the south side of the road where there were as yet few houses. It was an unwise decision, as the steamer might have provided the necessary pressure.

Two water mains ran along Seabrook Road. The firemen erected their escape ladder with the intention of using it as a water-tower, but the pressure from the first hydrant to which they connected their hoses could not

give a supply of water above the ground floor. At the subsequent Council enquiry they were told they should have used the other main; but there was evidence that although the fire started about 9.30pm, the pressure from this main did not come through adequately until 3 o'clock the next morning.

The Fire Brigade was blamed for using the wrong main; for not bringing enough hose; for not using the Canal. Some of the Waterworks Committee members disagreed with the acting Borough Surveyor. The Water Inspector's evidence did not clarify the situation. Fire Brigade representatives said that although they knew where the hydrants were, they had not been allowed to test the pressure, and had to rely on out-of-date information.

Hythe Chamber of Commerce also discussed the matter at length, some members criticising and others defending the Brigade. But the general feeling was that the firemen did not get the support they deserved. A similar conclusion was reached by the Council, after tests showed that neither hydrant would have provided adequate pressure.

Amidst the general acrimony, the disaster itself seemed to be lost sight of. Mrs. Davison and her servants just had time to escape unharmed, but nothing in the house was saved, and all that remained of the building were the chimney stacks and a little brickwork. The cost of the damage was estimated at over £6,000. (This was at a time when a three-bedroomed "semi" could be bought for £600.) Mrs. Davison left Hythe, and died just over three months later in Cambridge.

To add to the distress and embarrassment felt by all concerned, four firemen appeared before Hythe Magistrates charged with stealing items from the building and from the gardener's shed that escaped the fire. All four were put on probation for 12 months; three were then asked to resign from the Brigade, and the fourth was suspended for a year.

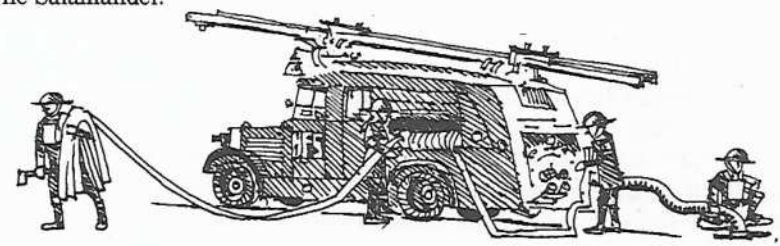
However, some good came out of the disaster, as the Council accepted the need for a reliable water supply. In fact there had been considerable improvements since the appointment of a new Surveyor in 1918: he was energetic and outspoken, and was described as a brilliant water engineer who practically revolutionised Hythe's water supply. Sadly, he had died a few weeks earlier after a long illness, and his permanent replacement had not yet taken over.

Now, the Fire Brigade was to be given every facility to practise wet drill. Its officers, as well as Council officials, were to have a register of every suitable source of water in the borough. There would be a full report on the state of the mains, and useless hydrants would be removed. When a fire occurred, the Water Inspector must go there to see that the fullest possible supply of water was available, and notify the Brigade that this was the case.

The firemen were told to use the steamer at all fires; their hoses, which had shown faults at *The Bungalow* fire, would be properly tested. Finally, the matter of providing better accommodation for their equipment would be considered immediately.

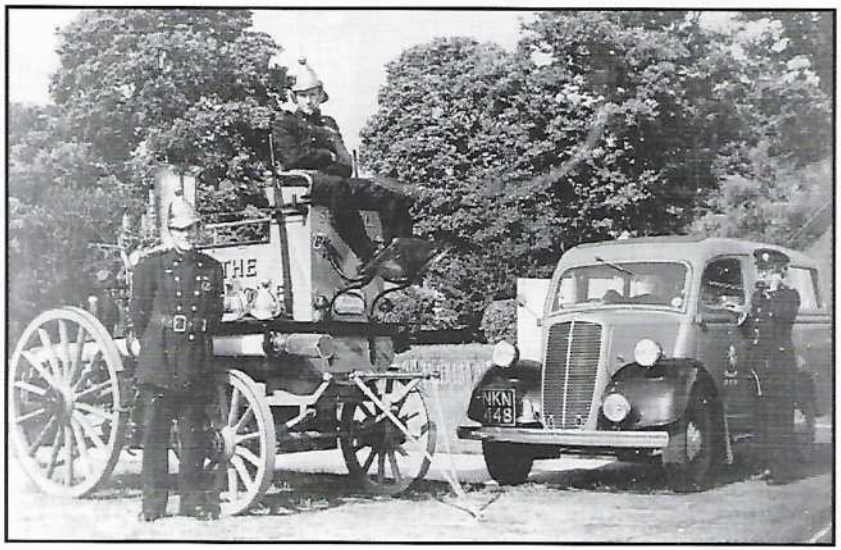
Their former Captain, Councillor Ashdown, said their uniforms had not been renewed for about 20 years, and some men had to wear their own boots to fires. Getting the tractor and the engine out of the Fire Station was not easy: " the engine had to be brought out true or the chimney would be knocked off". Although the Council grant had been increased over the years, the firemen still had to supplement this by house-to-house collections.

In 1924 the grant was increased to £200 – which at least approached the estimated expenditure of £250 a year. And in July 1925, the new Fire Station was opened on the site of the old one in Portland Road. The Brigade's first motor fire engine was bought in 1935 for just over £1,000. Mrs. J. J. Jenner, widow of the late Captain, christened it *Our King's Jubilee* in honour of King George V; but old firemen remember it as The Salamander.



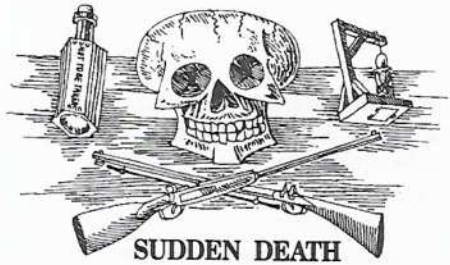
With the coming of World War II, Hythe Volunteer Fire Brigade was absorbed into the National Fire Service. Kent Fire Brigade came into existence in 1948, and Hythe's is now merely " E 21": East Division, District 21. But it still has one distinction: it is the only station of retained (part-time) firefighters in Kent to have two appliances on call. And all its present-day members are proud of its long and honourable history.

Dibgate Farmhouse, Blackhouse Hill, 19th May 1914. A young man, Lionel Davison, was found burnt to death later that day.




1951 Display. Fireman Jack Rogers on *Speedwell* and Sub-officer E.D. Clarke standing by. The new Fordson radio van was based at Folkestone.

Benjamin Buss following John and Susannah Lott at Burmarsh in 1768. The story is told on page 35.



## SUDDEN DEATH

THE LOWEST AND VILEST ALLEYS OF LONDON DO NOT PRESENT A MORE DREADFUL RECORD OF SIN THAN DOES THE SMILING AND BEAUTIFUL COUNTRYSIDE

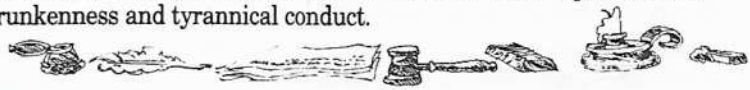
Sherlock Holmes to Doctor Watson, in *The Copper Beeches* Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Serious crime would naturally be rare in a town small enough for everyone to know his neighbour's business, in an age when travel other than on foot was the privilege of a wealthy few. But the official report on the Hythe Police Force in 1860 can hardly have been reassuring:

" Force, one constable. Area, in acres, 882. Population at the date of the last census, 2,650 . . . There is no police station, and the cells are situated in the old gaol and are badly conducted. The constable performs duty as he pleases, and I (Captain Willis, the Government Inspector) consider the police arrangements to be altogether of an inefficient character."

However, Romney Marsh fared even worse. There were two constables to cover nine parishes and parts of 18 other parishes.

Fifteen years later, the entire Hythe Borough Police Force, by now comprising one superintendent and three constables, was sacked by the Town Council after one of the constables had accused his superintendent of drunkenness and tyrannical conduct.



Who investigated a murder in 1612 is unknown; in fact most of the details of this crime have been lost. What the Hythe Assembly Book for 1613 (the equivalent of Council Minutes) records is that "one Gyles Sellinge of Westhethe" was "attached, endited (indicted), arrayned (arraigned), convicted and executed for wilfull murthering one John Sutton, his sonne-in-law, and for kylling his wife". His property was forfeited to the town.

Apparently Sellinge farmed at West Hythe. He possessed 29 sheep (wethers, ewes and lambs), which were sold for £10 1s.; two young hogs, sold for 12s.; a cock and two hens, sold for 1s.8d.; he was owed 13s. for

the sale of another hog. It was claimed that John Sutton had owed him £1 "for keepinge of sheepe", though this was denied.

The inventory of his household goods, with the prices they fetched, does not suggest prosperity, the total value being £2 4s.6d. The word "old" appears against several of the items.

It seems that Susan Sellinge and John Sutton were poisoned, since 3s.6d. was paid to the woman who tended them "in their sickness". They were buried at Lympne, the minister and clerk receiving 5s.10d. for officiating at the funeral, making the grave, etc. Carrying the bodies for burial cost 5s.6d.

From other items in the list of expenses we can obtain some idea of the legal proceedings. The Mayor of Hythe in his office as Coroner received £1 6s.8d. for viewing the bodies and conducting the inquests.

There is no indication that any of the formalities took place outside Hythe, though one would expect the case to have gone to the Assizes at Maidstone. The present Town Hall dates from 1794; it stands on the site of a Court and Market Hall built in 1660. But it is thought that an earlier building stood a short distance to the west, at Crunden's shop, and the initial hearing at least would probably have taken place there.

Mr. Edward Hadde gave assistance and counsel at the Sessions, for which he was paid £2 10s. Four men were employed to "ward" at the Sessions, at a cost of 1s.4d.

Michael Proude, the keeper of the prison, received a total of 34s.4d. for housing the prisoner. Sellinge was put in irons, and had straw to lie on. He spent six weeks in prison, his food costing 6d. a day; he was allowed a shirt.

The execution was carried out for a total cost of £1 7s.2d., including 15s. for making the gallows, and the hangman's fee of 10s. A man named Hayes came to perform the execution, and received 3s.6d. for his expenses when Sellinge "desired that one other might be his executioner". The Hythe sexton received 2s. for making his grave and tolling the passing-bell. [There were 12d in a shilling. One shilling = 5p in decimal currency.]

According to tradition, Gallows Corner was at the junction of Dymchurch Road and Scanlon's Bridge. A huge elm tree, known as the gallows tree (though probably dating only from the digging of the Canal at the beginning of the 19th century), stood there until November 1935, when the Ministry of Transport had it removed for road widening. Local historian Mr. F.B. Horton said that no proof existed that executions took place there.

By contrast, a great deal is known about the murder of John Lott, grazier and butcher, by his wife Susannah and her lover, Benjamin Buss, in 1768. The story, as told in the pages of *The Gentleman's Magazine*, has all the qualities of melodrama: love, villainy, and retribution.

John Lott, of Hythe, was a wealthy man. About two years before his death he hired a young girl as maidservant, and unwisely fell in love with her and proposed marriage. She refused him, and returned to friends in a nearby town. There she met Benjamin Buss, who earned his living mainly as a smuggler.

When John Lott followed her and repeated his proposal of marriage, Buss persuaded her to accept. He pointed out that Lott was much older, and she would one day be a wealthy widow. No sooner had the wedding taken place, however, than Buss decided to hasten her widowhood.

When Susannah had agreed to the murder, Benjamin Buss bought two ounces of corrosive sublimate from Mr. Gipps, a Hythe apothecary. (This is mercuric chloride, a by-product of calomel.) His opportunity to use it came not long after the wedding, when John Lott decided on a day's outing, and Buss was invited to join the party.

They set out on horseback, and when they stopped at Burmarsh for Lott to mend a bridle, Susannah and Benjamin asked him to order some milk bumbo (usually a mixture of rum, sugar and nutmeg in milk). Susannah drank first; then Benjamin. He then managed to poison the drink before passing it to Lott.

John Lott complained of the bitter taste, to the distress of the woman innkeeper. After their visitors had gone on their way, she and her daughter-in-law tasted the bumbo and agreed that it was unpleasant. However, poison was not suspected, even though they noticed a sediment " like paint" when they threw away the remainder.

Susannah convinced her husband that the water was probably bad. As they continued to Bonnington, he became very ill, with stomach pains and vomiting. However, after drinking a quantity of tea at Bonnington he felt better.

Benjamin Buss left them at Bonnington. On visiting them the next day at Hythe, he was disappointed to find his victim out of danger. He bought more poison, and gave it to Susannah to administer. John Lott was a strong man and at first seemed likely to recover, but the dose was repeated, and he died about nine days later.

However, people were beginning to talk. The authorities made investigations and found that Buss had bought poison. The women at Burmarsh were traced, and one confirmed that she had suffered sickness and vomiting after tasting the bumbo.

Mrs. Lott was arrested, and examined by Mr. Deedes, a Justice of the Peace for Kent. Eventually she made a full confession, which led to the arrest of Buss. He denied any involvement, but was also sent to prison.

Susannah spent seven months in prison at Canterbury before being taken to Maidstone for trial. She had to remain there a further four months because Mr. Gipps, the apothecary, was too ill to attend as a witness; in fact he died before the trial could take place. While in prison she gave birth to a child, which she insisted was her husband's.

Benjamin Buss had no intention of admitting his guilt: " He affected great spirit and unconcern, and said he wondered Mrs. Lott should accuse him, who knew no more of the matter than the magistrate who committed him." It was not until he was taken ill with gaol fever that he made a confession; on recovering, he denied everything.

They were tried at Maidstone Assizes in July 1769, and found guilty. Two days later they were taken to Penenden Heath to be executed.

Benjamin Buss was carried in a waggon drawn by four horses. Susannah, who wore the mourning dress she had bought on her husband's death, followed on a hurdle, also drawn by four horses. " She was modest and penitent; he was impudent and obdurate." Only moments before he was hanged did Buss admit his guilt.

Because the murder of a husband was classed as petty treason, Susannah Lott was sentenced to be burnt at the stake; this was a survival of Norman law. By the 18th century, however, it was customary to strangle the woman first. But her death still makes gruesome reading.

The stake was about seven feet high. Susannah Lott, standing on a stool, was fastened by the neck to a peg near the top. The stool was then taken away, and she was left to hang for about 15 minutes. Then her body was chained to the stake, faggots were piled round it, and she was burnt.

Normally a murderer's body was handed over for dissection, but

Benjamin Buss had begged that he might be spared this, since he had not actually committed the murder. This concession was granted, and his body was buried.

John Lott's address was not given, but the name Lott occurs in the Hythe Sessions Book quite often among jurors around this time. In 1766, a John Lott was fined one shilling "for throwing out Dung and Filth in the Back Lane". This would have been one of the streets behind the High Street – Chapel Street or Prospect Road. The following year, John Lott, butcher, was one of two referees for the White Hart, the Sun (now the King's Head) and the Duke's Head, paying £5 as guarantee. His name does not appear in 1768.

Smuggling was a full-time occupation for many men, with the sparsely-populated Romney Marsh providing an easy escape route inland. William Hodges, mariner, of Folkestone, and William Merrall, cordwainer, of Horton, appear to have been on the fringes of the smuggling trade.

The manner of their deaths, which does not reflect very creditably on the revenue men, is revealed in an account of the inquest held at the Swan Inn, Hythe (proprietor William Howard), in November 1790, before the Mayor, Thomas Tournay, in his office as Coroner, and a jury of 17 men.

A skirmish between smugglers and revenue men took place on Hythe sea shore between 6 and 7pm. Edward Hopper, a sawyer, of Hythe, testified that he went down to the shore with Hodges, meeting Merrall on the way. There they found a smuggling boat and a Revenue Custom House boat, the latter believed to be the *Lively*, a cutter.

Hopper claimed that he heard the Custom House people and the smugglers agree to share the cargo. He stated that the revenue boat was then brought alongside the smugglers' boat so that half the goods could be transferred, and that some of the revenue men were on board the smuggling boat. William Hodges was attempting to get out the sails to obtain access to the goods when one of the revenue men shot him with a blunderbuss from a distance of one yard, setting his clothes on fire.

As the witness was leading the injured Hodges up the beach, he heard more shooting. Then, " he got a chaise as expeditiously as he could and brought him therein to Hythe, and that he died in his arms before he could get him out at the Swan." Later, witness saw William Merrall dead on the beach, and was told that he was shot about the same time as Hodges.

Bazely Warman, mariner, of Folkestone, said he was in the smuggling boat that was chased in shore by the revenue cutter, and he heard the revenue

men agree to take half the goods. Then he heard firing, and shortly afterwards found Hodges wounded, and then saw Merrall dead on the beach. "He did not see any violence or resistance of any kind made, only a very earnest request from the part of the smugglers that the revenue people would take the half part of the goods only, which they agreed to do as beforementioned." William Brann, a Folkestone innholder (innkeeper), who had accompanied Hodges and Merrall to the sea shore, told a similar story.

Thomas Dray, surgeon, of Hythe, said that each man was killed by musket or large pistol ball. The jury decided that they "received their death wounds by balls fired by the people in the said smuggling boat, and it not appearing to the said jurors that any resistance or rescue was made by the smugglers, they on their oaths aforesaid do say that the said William Hodges and William Merrall were feloniously, wilfully and of malice aforethought killed and murdered by person or persons unknown."

What action – if any – was taken against the revenue men is not known.

When the Mayor of Hythe, Thomas Tournay, and a jury of 14 men inquired into the death of one George Moss of Burmarsh in 1806, it seemed that they were faced with a particularly nasty motiveless murder. The inquest had opened at the Great Gun public house, West Hythe, but was then transferred to the new Guildhall at Hythe. It was there that the jury arrived at their verdict:

" William Kill Patrick, late of Saltwood, private in the 43rd Regiment of Light Infantry, not having the fear of God before his eyes, but being moved and seduced by the instigation of the Devil . . . with a certain pistol of the value of two shillings, loaded with ball . . . did then and there give to the said George Moss a mortal wound by violently, feloniously, voluntarily and of his malice aforethought firing the said pistol at him, the said George Moss, whereby the ball from the said pistol entered the back of him . . . and passing through his body came out about two inches below his collar bone . . . of which mortal wound the said George Moss then and there instantly died."

However, it was a very different story that came out at Maidstone Assizes two months later.

George Moss, labourer, of Burmarsh, was in fact a deserter from the 1st Battalion of Guards, by name John Hyman. It was alleged that before

deserting on his regiment's return from Germany, he had robbed a fellow sergeant named Cheetham, Coldstream Guards, of his pocket book.

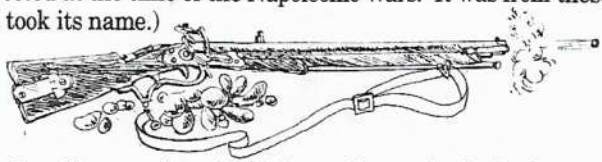
Captain J. Ellors, of the 43rd Regiment, testified that he sent Privates William Killpatrick and Patrick Dunning to arrest Moss. Sergeant J.H. Sturgill, 1st Regiment of Guards, afterwards identified the body as that of Hyman.

Moss had been working as a labourer near the eleven-gun battery on the coast for about a week. John Shuffleton, a gunner in the 3rd Battalion, Royal Artillery, had been working with him, and they sat down together on the beach for lunch. There, Moss was told that "one of the 43rd" wanted to speak with him. He refused to go, saying that anyone would have to come to him.

Killpatrick and Dunning then came up, and Moss asked what they wanted. Dunning replied, " Nothing but only to have a pot of beer with us." Moss refused, saying he did not know any of their regiment. The soldiers then accused him of being a deserter and attempted to arrest him, but he refused to accompany them. At last they showed him their pistols and, according to Shuffleton, threatened to blow his brains out. As Moss turned and ran away, Killpatrick shot at and killed him.

The Assize jury brought in a verdict of manslaughter, and Killpatrick was sentenced to two months' imprisonment.

It seems that Private Dunning, though presumably an accessory to the killing, did not stand trial with Killpatrick because he was inaccessible. He was believed to be with his regiment at Hythe Barracks, " but they are situated in the Parish of Saltwood out of the jurisdiction of Hythe." (These were not part of the later School of Musketry, but the older buildings north of Hillcrest Road, erected at the time of the Napoleonic Wars. It was from these that Barrack Hill took its name.)



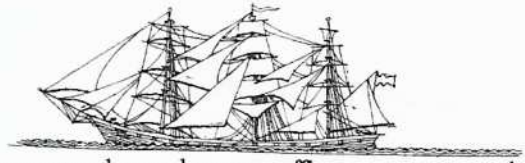
The death of Jonathan Hammondway in 1812 was the result of a freak accident that happened when men of the Rifle Corps were idly throwing stones at one another, while resting on the beach at Hythe during exercises.

Two witnesses said they thought one of the stones struck the trigger of a musket lying on the beach. One "saw the flash of the pan, and is positive that no person touched it at the time." The ball entered Hammondway's body near the shoulder as he lay on the beach, and he died almost at once.

Even a rural occupation such as milling had its dangers. In 1780, William Bond "a little after twelve o'clock was accidentally drawn between the Trundles and the Cog Wheels of a Windmill . . . and thereby received a very terrible fracture of his Skull which instantly killed him." Which of Hythe's several windmills was here involved is not known; but nearly 130 years later a similar accident occurred at the watermill in Horn Street, Seabrook, opposite the Britannia Inn.

Ernest Manktelow, aged 35, had for six years been manager of the mill, which was then owned by Messrs. Swoffer and Co. One day in 1909 he was attempting to replace a belt on the shafting when he seemed to overbalance, and was caught up by and twisted round the shafting. Apparently it was usual to do this job when the machinery was working at full speed: at the time, it was doing 100 revolutions per minute. He died instantly from multiple injuries. The message that was received by the police was: "A man has been cut to pieces."

Miller Stephen Brown met death in a different way at his mill; this was the smock mill adjacent to "Rockdean" in St.Leonard's Road. In 1817: " the deceased being in his Mill yesterday evening between the hours of eight and nine o'clock and standing under the Spindle, when a violent storm of thunder and lightning came on: the electric fluids or fire struck the deceased upon the head and instantaneously killed him. And the jurors aforesaid say that it appears that the Spindle of the Mill conducted the electric fluid into the Mill." Benjamin Horton, miller, who worked for Stephen Brown and was with him at the time, said that as he caught Brown in his arms," he only uttered the words 'Oh dear me' after he was struck with the fluid."



Violence between smugglers and revenue officers was commonplace along the coast during the early 19th century. It is ironic, therefore, that Lieutenant George Dyer of *H.M.S.Ramillies*, commanding the shore station at Fort Twiss, should have survived a number of battles with smugglers only to be accidentally killed by one of his own men.

The Coast Blockade was a predecessor of the Coastguards, being the first serious attempt by Government to challenge the smuggling gangs. It lasted from 1817 until 1831. It was originally formed to patrol the coast of

**Two privates of the 43rd Light Infantry, 1806**
Patrick Dunning with William Killpatrick in full fig, but when commanded to hunt a deserter they put down their muskets and carried concealed pistols. Story on page 38.

**The Saltwood Murder.** Albert and Nellie Wraight, tenants of No.1 Franklyn Villas, New Road. Mrs Bauldry was stabbed twice in the front room; she died in the scullery, a child in her arms.

Left and below. William Bauldry, manacled, being led to the inquest. Margaret Bauldry when she worked at the Metropole Laundry. The tracker and arrester PC G.Willson.

Kent, the Blockadesmen being armed and having orders to attack any smugglers they encountered. *H.M.S.Ramillies* was one of the command headquarters ships, though shore stations were later established.

Fort Twiss was near the present Hotel Imperial. Forts Sutherland and Moncrieff lay to the west of Hythe between the fishermen's beach and the Grand Redoubt.

In the early hours of an April morning in 1826, Lieutenant Dyer was on duty on the beach near the Stade with Petty Officer George Lewis. They heard firing in the direction of Shorncliffe, and Lewis called out: "Sir, there is firing to the eastward." As he said this, James Leman, a seaman in the Blockade Service, who was standing about 30 yards [27 metres] away, fired. Four bullets hit Lieutenant Dyer, and he died instantly.

When he heard Leman fire, Lewis exclaimed: " You damned fool! What do you fire for?" Leman replied: " I did not know who was coming; I hailed, but no answer." To this, Lewis demanded: " Were it so, if they were smugglers, why did you fire without an act of violence?" Then Michael Divine, the officer's orderly, cried out: " Good God! Mr. Dyer is shot."

It seems that about an hour earlier, information was received that a party of armed smugglers had been seen and had gone eastwards. Lieutenant Dyer had sent the Petty Officer to Fort Twiss to order the men there to be put on readiness. Leman said that as a result of this he thought that Lieutenant Dyer and his companions were smugglers.

Evidence was given that it was a dark night, and objects 50 yards [about 46 metres] away could not be recognised. No-one heard Leman call a challenge, but a witness admitted that if he spoke quietly, the sound of the officers' footsteps on the beach could have made his voice inaudible. However, all the men had been told that they must not use their firearms against any person whatever unless there was a threat of violence.

It was probably this order that brought about a verdict of manslaughter at Hythe Sessions.

The inquest at the Guildhall was conducted by the Mayor, James Shipdem, as Coroner, sitting with a jury of 12 men. They concluded that Lieutenant George Dyer "came to his death in consequence of a musket loaded with gunpowder and leaden bullets having been discharged and shot at him by one James Leman . . ." but that James Leman "did not of his malice aforethought discharge or fire the said musket."

Lieutenant Dyer was buried at Hythe with full military honours. His widow appealed for clemency to be shown James Leman, as she was convinced

that the shooting was accidental. Leman was sentenced to 14 days' imprisonment and fined one shilling.

Like every other town, Hythe had its slums. In 1875, probably the worst were Rose and Crown Cottages: all that can be said in their favour is that there were only four of them. They were situated between the High Street and Chapel Street, and the landlord of the inn of the same name let them to tramps and travellers. At one end of the row were pigsties and an open privy; at the other end, more pigsties and a slaughterhouse. The drainage of one set of sties ran in front of the cottages above ground to the other set.

Travelling hawker Charles Rendle, aged 58, and Ann Ponten, a year older, had spent the winter of 1874-5 in one of the cottages. Although she was described as his "paramour", they had lived together for about 30 years and considered themselves man and wife.

One Friday night, Rendle went into the Rose and Crown Inn and said that his wife was dead. They and a couple who were staying in another of the cottages had apparently been drinking steadily since Wednesday morning. At one stage Ann Ponten had gone to the Police Superintendent to complain that the landlady was knocking her husband about. The landlady, Mrs. Bailey, said she had knocked Rendle down twice because he insulted and assaulted her; in fact she had thrown both him and Ann Ponten out.

Charles Rendle was arrested after his wife was found to have a small bruise on the forehead; a post mortem examination showed a corresponding blood clot. Discovering exactly what had happened proved impossible, however, as none of the survivors of the drinking bout could remember much of what had taken place during the past two or three days.

The jury, after complaining about the unsatisfactory nature of the evidence, decided that Ann Ponten died "from extravasation of blood on the brain caused by a blow or fall". Charles Rendle was set free, but was warned that he could be re-arrested if any further evidence came to light.

People might have been forgiven for wondering if Police Superintendent George Raymond was himself sober when investigating the disturbances at the Rose and Crown, and later examining the dead woman. Barely two months later the Hythe Borough Police Force found itself in trouble with the Town Council after one of the constables accused the Superintendent of drunkenness and tyrannical behaviour on many occasions. The other two constables gave supporting evidence; and despite the fact that the

Superintendent called "several respectable witnesses" on his behalf, the Council, after sitting for five hours, asked all four men to resign.

A few days later the Council's Watch Committee decided to reinstate Superintendent Raymond and P.C. Aedy, one of his accusers. Following a petition signed by nearly 300 burgesses, P.C. Gauntlett was also reappointed. P.C. Harman, who had initiated the complaints, did not return; later that year, the constable who had replaced him resigned, declaring that he could not work under the Superintendent.

Despite Superintendent Raymond's patronage of many of the town's licensed premises, he was not universally popular among the proprietors. One landlord, who was a coursing (hunting the hare) enthusiast, invited him out for a day's sport on Romney Marsh. This involved much crossing of dykes by means of narrow plank bridges – and somehow a plank became loose as the Superintendent was walking on it. There were many willing "rescuers" to ensure that he was thoroughly soaked before they hauled him out of the dyke.

Eventually Raymond was forced to resign, and in 1878 John Aedy was appointed Head Constable or Superintendent; he seems to have been generally liked and respected. The members of the Watch Committee "concurred in their opinion that the police were going on extremely well, and that the feeling in the town was that they were conducted satisfactorily."

The Hythe Borough Police Force was taken over by Kent in 1899.

Rose and Crown Cottages were not demolished until 1931.

A crime that shocked the whole district was the murder in 1908 of Margaret Elizabeth Bauldry by her husband William – especially as it took place in a respectable street in tranquil Saltwood.

This was the violent climax to an unhappy marriage. A quarrel broke out over a note written by the wife to her husband about the welfare of one of their daughters. Both lost their tempers, and the man cut his wife's throat.

The Bauldrys had been married for nine years, and had two sons and two daughters. William Bauldry, who was 42 when he committed murder, had served in the Army, and was given a very good character when he took his discharge in 1890. In civilian life he was a reliable employee at first; then he worked for a short while at the School of Musketry as a fatigue-man,

but for some reason threw this up and became a casual labourer.

His Saltwood-born wife, aged 33 when she died, had before her marriage been a parlourmaid, and had worked at the Swan Hotel and also at the Metropole Steam Laundry in Dymchurch Road. Her husband's irregular employment had forced her to try to earn money from bean-cutting at West Hythe and hop-picking at Chilham, but she suffered a miscarriage and was seriously ill afterwards.

The couple had parted on several occasions. Maggie Bauldry was reluctant to enter the Workhouse, and a member of the Board of Guardians had found lodgings for her in New Road, Saltwood, providing out-relief until she could obtain an official separation order against her husband. She had the youngest child with her; the elder boy was looked after by her brother.

The two girls lived with Bauldry's mother in Boxley Square off Dymchurch Road, and it was there that he received the letter which roused him to fury:

" I hope you won't let little May run about in those boots any longer. Keep her indoors until I can do something for her. It makes my heart ache to see her. She will be crippled."

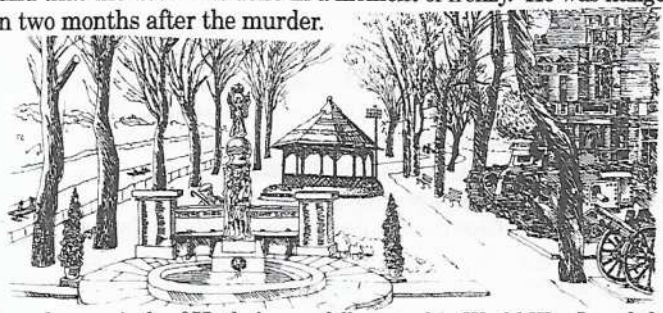
He called on his wife, the note in his hand; and a quarrel developed which led to her death.

Nellie and Albert Wraight, the tenants of the house where Mrs. Bauldry was lodging, tried to intervene without taking sides. Bauldry, who was apparently sober, later claimed that the couple could have stopped him attacking his wife, and that the man had abused him. This was denied.

A neighbour, summoned to help, found Mrs. Bauldry lying on the kitchen floor with her throat cut, but still alive. She was still clutching her two-year-old son in her arms. The district nurse tried to help her, but Maggie Bauldry died before the doctor arrived.

The local policeman quickly tracked Bauldry down Dark Lane, and arrested him at the Gate Inn, Hythe, little more than half an hour after he had been called to the house. At the inquest at Saltwood Village Hall, it was stated that Bauldry " took a great interest in the proceedings, and created quite a thrill of excitement when, in a strong, clear voice, he said: ' I must admit that I have done it'." He remained calm and unemotional until his elderly mother ran up to embrace him, saying "Mercy on you" as he was being taken back to Seabrook Police Station.

At Maidstone Assizes, William Bauldry was found guilty of murder. He was sentenced to death, with a strong recommendation to mercy on the ground that the deed was done in a moment of frenzy. He was hanged less than two months after the murder.



Although one-sixth of Hythe's menfolk served in World War I, and there are 154 names on the town's War Memorial, only two civilians died as a result of enemy action. The verger, Daniel Stringer Lyth, a former Town Sergeant, was standing in the churchyard with the Vicar and his wife; Mrs. Amy Parker, of Ormonde Road, had gone to call a child indoors. Both the verger and Mrs. Parker were killed, struck by bomb splinters. This was on 25th May, 1917, when more than 70 people were killed in an air raid on Folkestone, most of them in Tontine Street. Several bombs fell on Hythe on that occasion, but did little damage.

By June 1916, Hythe people were becoming accustomed to hearing news of the deaths in action of the town's young men. This did not diminish the shock they felt when two boys were killed in separate incidents by their friends who were playing with guns.

Benjamin Dearman, who was 17 when he died, was a member of a well-known Hythe family. His father, James Dearman, was coxswain of the lifeboat for many years, and tried to serve in the war by enlisting in The Buffs when he was 59, first subtracting 20 years from his age. The names of two other sons appear on the War Memorial.

Benjamin, a brother, and two other boys were walking along the Canal bank towards West Hythe when they met two friends, who had a rifle and had gone out to shoot rats. The 14-year-old boy, who had bought the gun about a month earlier and held a valid licence for it, apparently forgot that he had drawn out the safety catch when he saw a rat. He

pointed the gun at the group of boys in fun, and accidentally shot Benjamin in the stomach. The boy was operated on that evening, but died.

The 14-year-old was bound over for one year, and his rifle and ammunition were confiscated.

Only two days later, a similar accident occurred at Saltwood. The victim was 13-year-old Edwin Heritage, who was living with his grandparents at Redbrooks House, off Bartholomew Lane. His father, formerly licensee of the Princess Royal public house, South Street, Folkestone, had been called up and was serving in France.

Edwin was one of four boys playing in Redbrooks Wood. Two of the boys had rifles, borrowed from their homes without their families' knowledge, and were shooting at a tin balanced on a wall. As Edwin came out from behind the wall, the gun carried by the youngest boy, a 12-year-old schoolfriend, went off. Edwin was shot in the stomach, and died in hospital the following morning.

At the inquest, it was stated that both boys were accustomed to guns: the elder (aged 16) said that he had used one for about four years to shoot rats and squirrels. The small boy who fired the fatal shot had been taught to use a gun, but his father had forbidden him to take it out when playing with other boys. Neither had a licence.

The Coroner emphasised the need for legislation to establish a minimum age for the purchase of ammunition, and also for the carrying of rifles.

Edwin's father, Private W.R. Heritage, 16th Middlesex Regiment, survived his only child for little more than a year, dying from illness in August 1917.

Less than three months before the world was again plunged into war, a young man described as "a brilliant aircraft designer" died as the result of a foolish practical joke.

Flight Lieutenant Nicholas Comper, of Brooklands Aerodrome, Surrey, was staying in Hythe with an old friend, Mr. L.P. Kent, proprietor of the Swan Hotel, in June 1939. He was a frequent visitor to the town, and machines of his own design had won prizes in the Folkestone Aero Trophy contests.

Both Mr. Kent and the dead man's brother agreed that he was "an inveterate practical joker." When he came from London to spend the weekend in Hythe he brought with him a box of fireworks. After dinner on the

Saturday evening he let off some in the garden, until a nearby resident complained about the noise. Mr. Kent took the box away from him, not realising that he had more fireworks in his pocket.

About 11 o'clock that night he was outside Stebbing's shop on the corner of Great Conduit Street (now SEEBoard), where he placed a firework on the pavement and set light to it.

A Hythe man, Mr. Samuel Reeves, was standing on the opposite pavement with his wife and a friend. He thought the firework looked like a small bomb, and as he crossed the road Flight Lieutenant Comper said, " I am an I.R.A. man." Mr. Reeves struck him on the jaw, and he fell, hitting his head on the pavement.

Mr. Reeves's friend said that Flight Lieutenant Comper had added, " I will blow you all up." A police constable, standing outside the nearby Cinque Ports Club, witnessed the incident and heard the reference to the I.R.A. He extinguished the burning object, which was later identified as a " Guy Fawkes mine"; this would have flared up and crackled, sending a shower of stars into the air.

Flight Lieutenant Comper was unconscious when carried into the Swan. He recovered consciousness briefly, but died in hospital the following morning from compression of the brain caused by hæmorrhage.

Samuel Reeves appeared before Hythe Magistrates on a charge of manslaughter. A witness from Hendon Police College said there was no danger of an explosion from the firework, but admitted he might have thought it was a bomb if he had seen it lighted on the pavement at 11 o'clock at night. He had seen bombs as small as that used in various places, though most were larger.

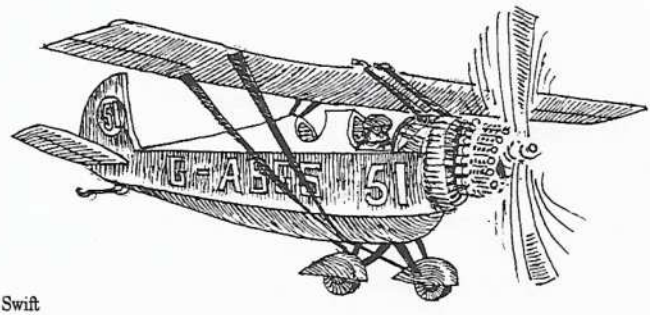
The Bench unanimously agreed that the evidence did not justify a trial for manslaughter, and Mr. Reeves was discharged. A labourer, he had had to employ a solicitor. After his acquittal, Mr. J.B. Horton, who was Hythe's oldest magistrate, said he would pay the costs for him.

Nicholas Comper was a very gifted man, and although his main interest was the design of light aircraft for private ownership, it is likely that Britain at war would have been glad of his skill. Only hours before his death he had been talking of his ideas for a plane in which the Air Ministry was interested.

During World War I he served in the Royal Flying Corps and the Royal Air Force. He began designing planes as a result of a shilling bet that he could build a halfpenny-a-mile " baby" machine. In 1929 he

formed his own company, Comper Aircraft Ltd., and his best-known design was of the Comper Swift, an exceptionally fast light aeroplane. One of these took second place in the King's Cup Race in 1933 with an average speed of 155.75 mph. His machines won many British and international air events. Locally, they were particularly successful in the International Light Aeroplane Race of 1932, on a triangular course between Lympne Aerodrome and the air sheds at Capel, for the Folkestone Aero Trophy.

Commercial aircraft manufacture was a highly competitive business in the 1930s, and the markets for his machines suffered from the world depression. But in spite of business setbacks he was continually developing new ideas. At the time of his death he was working at Brooklands with the students of the College of Aeronautical Engineering, who were building a new plane to his design.




The Comper Swift first flew in 1929

In September 1939, war came again. Hythe was spared flood and fire; 61 of its servicemen and nearly 30 of its civilians met violent deaths. The town itself, though bruised and battered, survived without too many of its familiar buildings lost.

But that is another story.

## Acknowledgments and Sources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*The Folkestone and Hythe Herald*
*The Dover Express*

*The Hythe Reporter*
Hythe's own newspaper
which flourished for over 50 years

*The Folkestone Chronicle*
*The Folkestone Express*
*The Folkestone Observer*
*The Cinque Ports Herald*
none of which has survived.

*The Gentleman's Magazine*

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