

Seaside Sestina: A Folkestone Romance

Carolyn Oulton

I felt a change of air was called for. Papa had seen
 Fashionable Folkestone praised – it was a local paper,
 but taken by hotels with good London addresses.
 After the usual enquiries I suggested lodging
 somewhere on the Leas, overlooking the pier.
 Expensive? Rather, but of course it
 was vital for her to forget... This was the course it
 seemed right to pursue. I couldn't have foreseen...
In later days she would peer
with a meniscus eye, lid drooping like wet paper;
as if at some thought she had trouble dislodging.
 Just a girlish whim! A good parent addresses
 these freaks kindly but firmly. A sweet trunk for dresses
 was purchased and packed on the spot. Of course it
 happened we'd be as near where Lord Percy was lodging
 as if a careful mama had set the scene.
 It was one thing taking charge of the writing paper.
 But the people one meets on the pier!
 Gushing over what they call views without peer.
 That man dared to follow, renew his addresses.
 Seaside love, I said, is flimsy as paper.
 That day she was bathing with no corset
 in slippery waves. What happened next was obscene.
 He saw his chance – machine slowly tilting, wheels lodging
 in wet sand. Half carried her back to where we were lodging.
 Papa's deplorable joke about a peer
 less bride was bad enough. Then came a ghastly scene,
 such insult to Lord Percy as no speech redresses.
 As for this town, well might a gentleman curse it.
 Someone I said should write to that wretched paper.
 I burned her letters along with the other waste paper,
 when she wrote from the honeymoon in a pokey lodging -
 some house in Tontine Street. It was all so coarse. It,
 well some things are best forgotten. It would appear
 there were objections to Lord Percy. Strange addresses,
 or so the gossip claimed, where he'd been seen.

Years pass. Of course it is just to change the paper.
But I have seen her, dislodging a stiff drawer,
Stop and peer for a moment at those summer dresses.

Found in the Library

Carolyn Oulton

‘The Folkestone Library and Its Mismanagement.’

Folkestone Express, Sandgate, Shorncliffe & Hythe Advertiser. 24 August 1889.

We do not question specialists
 but experience demonstrates
 profound respect for petitions.
 The history of the Public Library
 is a free reading room.
 We had in Folkestone modest requirements.
 The committee began to purchase books.
 At once the library began to compete
 With private enterprise.

*Whoever heard of fiction
 doing an atom of good?
 It is not incumbent on the working public
 To supply fiction
 for the use of idle people.*

We do not agree
 that modern novels are pernicious,
 should be preserved
 among the works of reference,
 not allowed
 to get into youthful hands.
 Even with the present expensive building
 the librarian is not too well paid.
 The circumstances at present are peculiar.

Library records for October 1891. New borrowers include one verger, two bathchairmen.

From the catalogue of the Folkestone Free Library

Taken at the Flood
 Seagull Rock
 Dead Sea Fruit
 Secrets of the Sands

Reminiscences of Old Folkestone Smugglers

On application to the librarian
 Picturesque Canterbury, Deal, Dover,
 Folkestone
 etc etc etc

Annual report 1902-03. Lending department reorganised, obsolete volumes removed.

Annual report 1903-04. Large increase in the use made of the library.

FFL Villanelle**Carolyn Oulton**

‘Folkestone library in Grace Hill closed as a safety precaution after flooding causes water damage.’ *Kent Online*, 21 December 2022.

‘In an updated statement, the council has again confirmed that the library is to remain closed “at least until further notice”, as the funds required for the significant works are “unfortunately not available in the current financial climate.”’ *Kent Live*. 4 April 2023.

Books are breaking through the walls.
Water can’t climb hillsⁱ
a newsboy calls.

A sister shrieks, a brother bawls.
The building slowly fills.
Books are breaking through the walls.

The women take off shawls,
(although the weather chills)
a newsboy calls.

Ethelⁱⁱ tuts at her pencil and scrawls.
Gas hurts her head and brings more bills.
Books are breaking through the walls.

New fiction beckons and appals,
more floods of Braddons, Fothergills.
A newsboy calls.

In a moment water falls
across the stairs. It foams and frills.
Books are breaking through the walls.
A newsboy calls.

ⁱ According to local legend St Eanswythe created a water source by causing a river to run uphill to the Bayle, where the Folkestone Free Library was originally based. The library was relocated to Grace Hill in 1888 and the first librarian was George Hills.

ⁱⁱ Ethel Hills is named as the Assistant to the Librarian in the report for 1892-93.