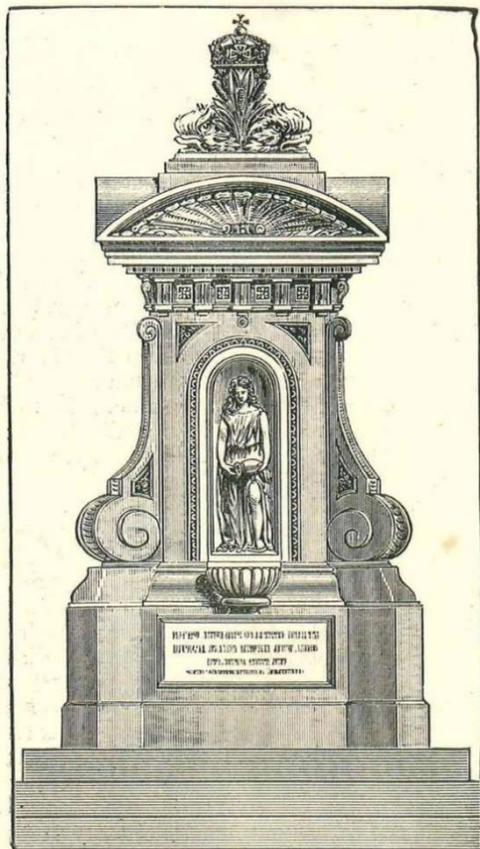


Herne Bay's Jubilee Fountain

Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887 gave rise to a large number of commemorative events, when many towns and villages chose to mark the occasion with celebrations, both large and small. Some of the more enduring artifacts from the time are those that contributed to the built environment, with hospitals, libraries, schools and clocks proving to be popular choices. Many were funded by public subscription, while others were funded privately by wealthy individuals.



The Drinking Fountain.

A contemporary engraving from the time of the fountain's installation

Herne Bay's public contribution to the Jubilee, included the provision of the Board Schools in Kings Road, new offices for the Local Board and the redevelopment of Tower Gardens, a stretch of the promenade situated between the pier entrance and the clock tower. Prior to 1887, this part of the seafront was unmade, consisting of rough grass with just a few trees for decoration, so these improvements would have been a real boost for residents and visitors alike. Twentieth century improvements included the addition of the Central Bandstand in 1926 and the creation of a sunken formal garden in 1992. Part of the 1992 scheme included the adoption of the name of Waltrop Gardens, in honour of the town's German twinning connection.

drink was bottled and exported, in time growing to become the business that was the foundation of today's well-known brand. Apart from business life, Davis engaged in London politics, acting as an Alderman for Bishopsgate before being chosen to serve as Sheriff for London and Middlesex in 1887, the Golden Jubilee year. This period in public life was then followed by Davis serving as an MP on two separate occasions for seats in the Medway Towns. His military connection was achieved as an officer in the Middlesex Artillery Volunteers, retiring with the rank of honorary Lieutenant Colonel. In what seems to be a very full life, Davis was also involved with several Livery Companies and rose in prominence to become Master of the Spectacle Makers, serving as Lord Mayor in 1897, the Diamond Jubilee year, culminating with the honour of a knighthood at the end of his term in office.

By the time Herne Bay was gifted its drinking fountain in 1888, the purpose of such structures was largely ornamental. In earlier times, fountains were of course an important source of household drinking water, but while other sources would have been available, it seems certain that many of the visitors to the town would have welcomed the opportunity to take refreshment at the new fountain, while taking a stroll along the promenade.

Prestigious London based stone carving firm, F G Anstey of Regents Park, were the company responsible for the design and construction of the fountain. A helpful description of the fountain was published in the local press at the time and this reads thus;

Apart from the public contributions, Herne Bay was fortunate to receive the gift of a fountain funded by Major and Sheriff Horatio David Davies. Today, this fountain forms the focal point of the sunken gardens, and while the stone is weather-worn and some of the fine detail of the skilful carving has eroded over time, this remains an important and arguably underappreciated, part of the town's built heritage.

Donor, Horatio David Davis, was one of those people from the Victorian period who seem to have had many and varied interests. As his name suggests, Davis was from a family of Welsh origin, but he spent much of his life in London and Nottinghamshire, before he purchased Wateringbury Place near Maidstone, Kent, in 1890. Prior to this, Davis had resided for a short while at both Eddington House and Strode Park – hence the local connection. After school, Davis started life as an apprentice engraver before embarking upon a career in business as a restaurateur and wine merchant.

In 1880, Davis purchased a company with the rights to the Pimms beverage, and it was under his leadership that the

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Major Horatio David Davis c.1898 by which time he had been knighted

“...it stands on a base of Yorkshire Greenmoor stone, and is raised from the surrounding promenade on all sides by two broad steps. The fountain itself is carried on an entablature of Portland stone, from which rises, at each angle, boldly carved supports reaching up to the carved plinth of the head. This headstone, which weighs about two tons, has a broad frieze intersected with carved trusses running round it, and immediately under a deeply recessed and carved shell shaped pediment, the whole is surmounted by an elaborately carved capstone, on which is a design composed of bullrushes and foliage, while all over, is a crown and a Maltese cross. The body of the fountain proper is recessed into four panels, on the southern side there is a carved marble figure holding an amphora, whence the water flows with a constant trickling stream”.

The inscription tablet is of polished Aberdeen granite and this bears the following wording:

“Presented to the town of Herne Bay as a jubilee memorial of Queen Victoria’s reign by Major Horatio D Davis, Sheriff of London and Middlesex, 1887-8”.



The fountain in its original position, to the east of the Clock Tower

At the time of its installation, the fountain stood on the promenade just to the east of the clock tower, a place where it remained for just over a century. The public unveiling of the fountain took place at 3pm on Wednesday 19th September 1888 as part of a ceremony blessed with fine weather. It had been decided well in advance, that the occasion would be marked with a display of flags, bunting, stars, crowns and mottos. A special Decorations Committee had been formed to coordinate and oversee preparations and they did well to secure the services of the local Coastguard as to help with the task. Illuminations were loaned by the local gas works and music was courtesy of the promenade band as well as members of the local

regiment, The Buffs. By all accounts, a large concourse of people had gathered around the platform erected for the occasion. All shops were closed from 2:00pm and the children from the Local Board Schools received an invitation from the Chairman of the Local Board to witness the ceremony. After the customary speeches and replies, Mr Taylor from the local water board turned on the water supply and Major Davis declared the fountain open. The formalities were concluded with a rendition of the National Anthem and later that afternoon, refreshments for those involved. It was noted that the local water company were generously supplying the water free of charge.

Sadly, today, the fountain no longer has a trickle of water issuing forth from the female figure’s pitcher. We can however, still enjoy the fountain, and be thankful to Major Davis for his generous gift to the town, while at the same time, taking a moment to sit or stand and admire the hard work, skill and dedication of those who look after the well-tended flower beds and borders that surround it. Although the fountain no longer functions, those desiring a drink, can use the adjacent modern water dispenser installed by Canterbury City Council as part of the national “Refill” scheme.



Mike Bundock

The fountain today, forming the centrepiece of The Walthrop Gardens