

## A Visit to the Other Faversham

Yes, gunpowder was invented by the Chinese, but did you realise that its history in Kent is closely associated with the town of Faversham? We know about the town's brewery, the churches and the grammar school but the gunpowder industry, which finally closed down in 1934, accounted for much of the development and wealth of the town.



There are two main sites to visit, the Oare Nature Reserve and the Museum at Chart Gunpowder Mills. The nature reserve at Oare was formed around the 'leats' or narrow gauge canals that wind in to the creek at Faversham. The leats were first excavated to provide passage for the raw materials (some of these might surprise you!) on their way to the works,

and then to transport the barrels of gunpowder to Chatham Docks and Upnor. Remains of the blast walls, the glazing and corning houses, plus an 80-year-old powder mill repatriated from Ayrshire, are incorporated in the layout of the nature reserve. Everything is easily accessible along a waymarked walk, with good signboards providing information.

Chart Mills are very different. The oldest of their kind in the world, these mills laid the foundation for Britain's military supremacy. Here, the powder was produced for Nelson at Trafalgar and Wellington at Waterloo. In peacetime, the gunpowder was used to blast routes for Britain's growing network of railways and canals. Today, the Museum is surrounded by a modern housing estate, but the interior has been well restored by members of the Faversham Society. The great milling machine takes pride of place, but there are scale models, a photographic exhibition of the way the mills looked in the 19th century and an impressive biographical record of all those who worked at the mills.

Also worth visiting is the Fleur de Lys Heritage Centre in Faversham. (Why does this have a French name? Because so many of the workers in the town were of Huguenot origin.) This manages to straddle the demands of younger visitors with reconstructed rooms etc, but there are well researched exhibitions and a good bookshop where the U3A member can browse and find worthwhile texts.