

Mrs Stephenson's winning entry

"My husband and I had made a decision to move from the Midlands to the coast. We were not sure which coastline we preferred. We arrived at Folkestone on a Friday morning to explore the area and came across the Leas and then the Grand Hotel.

We entered the beautiful entrance of the hotel and heard the music from the piano; we felt we were stepping back in time, to a long lost era.

We took a drink and the delightful waitress who served us explained that we could later take

a tour of the hotel and hear all about its history and then have a cream tea.

After our lovely full afternoon in the hotel and meeting the very nice local people who were also enjoying the tour and sharing with us their memories that various photographs studied around the hotel evoked, we all went to Palm Court, which we now know as the Monkey House, and enjoyed our beautiful cream tea and my husband and I shared our news that we had decided to make this area our home."

Winning memories

Luxury prize for tale of falling for Folkestone

Report by Eleanor Jones

eleanor.jones@KRNmedia.co.uk

A COUPLE who made their decision to move to Shepway over tea at The Grand will enjoy a

luxurious Christmas there, thanks to their recollections.

Elaine and Ken Stephenson will be enjoying a three-course meal and entertainment on December 25 as winners of the recent Grand Memories competition, for which entrants were asked to submit written accounts of their experiences at the hotel.

Mrs Stephenson said: "I was flabbergasted to hear I'd won because there were so many other lovely stories.

"We're really looking forward to our Christmas - and it'll be very nice not to have to cook."

The pair, originally from Liverpool, were living in Leicester when they made their first trip to Folkestone in September 2005.

Mrs Stephenson, 51, said: "We'd always loved the coast but couldn't have been living any further away from the sea.

"We decided to move and the only question was, where to? So we went on tour."

The Stephensons first thought of Dorset but, during some internet research, found out about the regeneration planned for Folkestone and decided to visit for a weekend.

Mother-of-two Mrs Stephenson said: "We walked along The Leas and came into the Grand - it was like stepping back in time to a long-lost era.

"We went back into town then



NEW MEMORIES: The Grand's Robert Richardson presents winners Elaine and Ken Stephenson

returned to the Grand to go on a tour of the hotel.

"It was fantastic. As we were walking round, I said, 'I could move here,' and by the time we were sitting in the Palm Court restaurant with a cream tea afterwards, we'd decided.

"The Grand is where we made our decision and we love it here - without a doubt, it was the right one."

Other Grand Memories entries included poetry, hand-written cards made by children and

accounts of relatives of past staff. General manager Robert Richardson originally came up with the idea.

He said: "The winning piece exemplifies the place the Grand has in people's hearts.

"The fact they came here and made such a massive decision is tremendous and, for me, put them head and shoulders above the rest.

"But all the entries were special - I'm very lucky that people shared their memories with me."

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