

Royal taste satisfied

The chef, M Dutru, came from the Savoy, and the manager, Gustav Gelardi, from the Walsingham, both friends of the King and associates of César Ritz & Auguste Escoffier. A descendant, another Gelardi, is now manager of the Lanesborough.

Royal prerogative

In 1909 the King opened the new ballroom containing the first sprung dance floor in Europe. The first dance he took with the Queen, and the second with Mrs Keppel. A medal was struck to commemorate the event, and the King allowed the royal coat of arms to be used to publicise the establishment.



Alice Keppel



Ballroom

Personalities & war

During the Great War the building was used as a refuge for the Belgian royal family and military hospital; thereafter the Prince of Wales's

patronage, later Edward VIII, assisted its resurgence, although Mrs Simpson stayed a little way away. Ward Lock's guide described The Leas outside the front door as indisputably the finest marine promenade in the world. Robert Morley made his stage debut here, as did Michael Caine not a lot of people know that! Albert Sandler started the Palm Court Orchestra in the Monkey House, but all were driven away from Frontline Folkestone by the fall of France. The building was badly damaged by shelling from the French coast.



Dining Room

Murderous decline

In the 50s, when you never had it so good, it was

Princess Margaret's turn, and Agatha Christie, who had been writing Murder on the Orient Express at the time she stayed in one of the suites before the war, still came regularly. But by the 60s rail travel was being supplanted by air to more distant climes for the beau monde, and rent controls were such that the sale of leases of the apartments became the favoured option.

And rejuvenation

However, with the ending of rent controls and the vast improvement in communications in the wake of the Channel Tunnel, the apartments are again being let; but whereas they cost two guineas a day in 1903 probably equivalent to £200 today some can now be had for a week or more for under £200.

Once again enjoyment for all

To complement this, the unrivalled public rooms have been restored; Keppels, at one time decked out as the Seventies Disco, has had its years of accretions stripped away, and once more exudes its Edwardian ambience as an intimate bar/bistro. The Palm Court alias the Monkey House has acquired a tented ceiling, a magical array of plants illuminated by over 5000 lights at night, and fine food and service to match, and



Palm Court

the adjacent oak panelled Tudor Room has a bar, sumptuous sofas and a collection of massive old oil paintings catalogued as part of the national archive.



THE GRAND HISTORY



Grand Tour

2pm Mondays from May to September
£7 pp including Cream Tea
Allow two hours

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A Grand potted history

100 years old

When The Grand was built a little over 100 years ago, it incorporated many novel features which have since become the norm.

Rivalry

At the time Folkestone was one of the most fashionable and prosperous coastal resorts. The Metropole, which stands immediately next door, had just been constructed, and a local builder who had been disappointed not to secure the building contract became determined to build a rival establishment which was better in every way.

World first

The builder, Daniel Baker, was in the forefront of innovative design; he had already developed the use of cavity wall ties, and went one better with The Grand, waterproof cavity wall insulation. He used a steel frame, one of the first, to give the large clear spans to the main reception rooms, and, said to be a world first, infilled it with reinforced concrete. And he used suspended ceilings for improved soundproofing.



Daniel Baker as Mayor of Folkestone

Maximum view - & sun

Not only was he innovative, but also he was able to utilise new techniques to excellent effect. The steel frame allowed his formative use of curtain walling, resulting in the windows covering almost the entire width of the elevations to make the most of the sunny location and the fabulous views. And a by-product of the concrete floors was one of the first examples of wall-to-wall carpeting.

The place to be

The building was constructed as gentlemen's residential chambers, and immediately established a reputation as the place to be and be seen. The King, Edward VII, became a frequent visitor, so much so that the locals would wander along The Leas in front of the building peering into the glasshouse to catch a glimpse of him; apparently because he and his friends were heavily bearded, it became likened to looking at monkeys in a cage, hence the sobriquet Monkey House.



Edward VII

Monkey Business

The King came not only with the Queen but also his intimate friend Alice Keppel, an hour-glass blue eyed beauty the epitome of elegance, lively wit and discretion, popularising the expression monkey

business; his favoured three piece suits are still known as monkey suits in America.

A drink problem

Although the area now known as Keppels was then surrounded by an earth bank to keep out prying eyes, which Mrs Keppel's great grand-daughter the Duchess of Cornwall might appreciate, this was more to do with the absence of a drinks licence. When the local landowner, the Earl of Radnor, granted the lease for the building of The Metropole, he accepted a condition that he would not allow another hotel to be built within 600 yards. Hostilities commenced even before the laying of bricks, and became so acrimonious that Lord Radnor and Daniel Baker fenced off The Leas to prevent Metropole patrons gaining access!

A solution

To overcome the liquor problem, patrons' requirements were summoned from the local purveyors by telephone, and a lad would deliver them by bicycle! A subterranean cavern was excavated below Keppels accessed by hidden stairs to secrete customers' own supplies, incorporating another new invention, refrigeration.

Another solution

And to further assist discrete communication, a telephone box in rustic style was installed outside on The Leas, said to be yet another world first.

'The King, Edward VII, became a frequent visitor'



The Metropole Folkestone The Grand