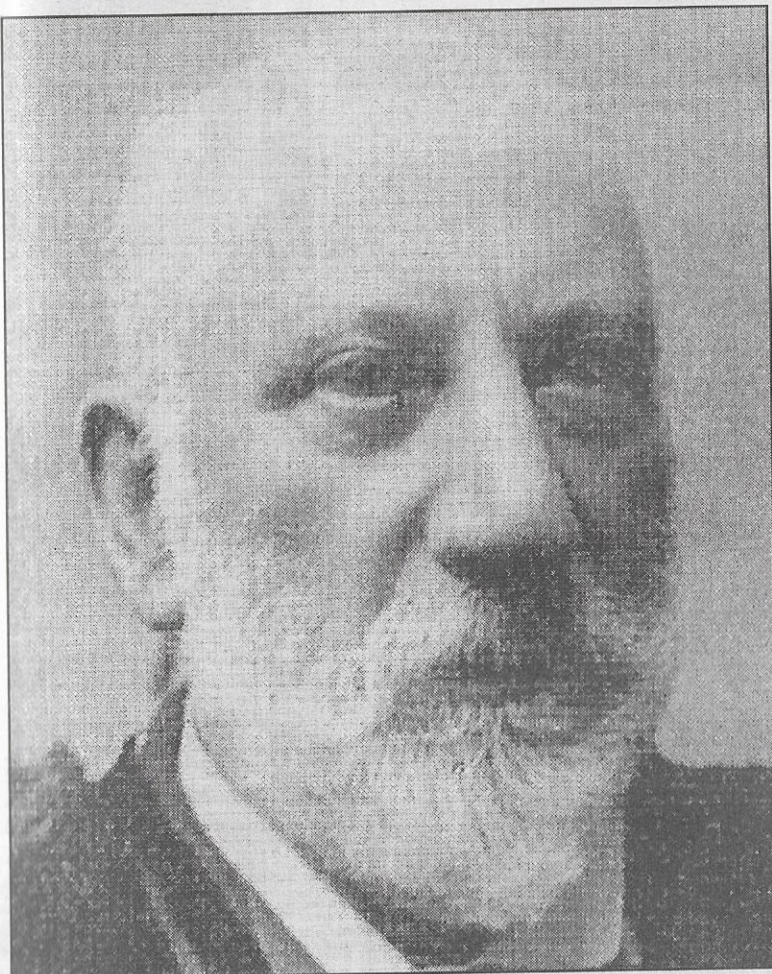




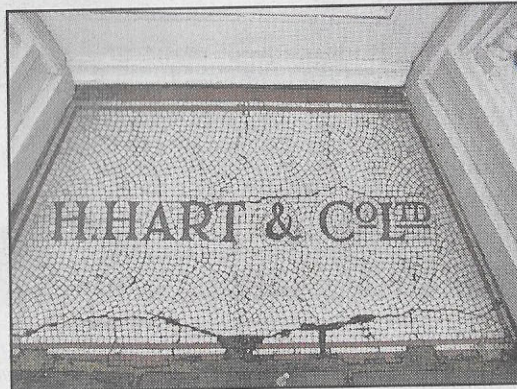
THE WAY WE WERE

Local luminary who rang the changes in communications

Henry Hart was early advocate of telephones




SIGNIFICANT FIGURE: Henry Hart was an alderman for 50 years



WHAT'S IN A NAME? The entrance to the Oxfam shop at 13 Best Lane

Way We Were




David Lewis
Canterbury Historical and Archaeological Society

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Who was H Hart and what did he do for Canterbury? As it turns out, Henry Hart (1833-1921) did quite a lot: leader of the local...





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HAVE you ever wondered about the name you walk over whenever you enter the Oxfam shop at 13 Best Lane?

Who was H Hart and what did he do for Canterbury? As it turns out, Henry Hart (1833-1921) did quite a lot: leader of the local Jewish community, three times mayor, alderman for 50 years, city and county magistrate, governor of Simon Langton, and more.

His commercial interests in pawnbroking and clothing shops flourished in Canterbury, Folkestone and Dover. The premises at 13 Best Lane became just one of his many business outlets.

But we owe Henry a special vote of thanks for the role he played in the late 1880s in getting the city council to see the potential benefits of the new technology of the day – telephonic communication.

Telephones

The first serious proposals for the introduction of telephones to Canterbury were laid before the General Purposes Committee in late November 1887, with strong support from Alderman Hart.

A telephone link between the city police, fire brigades, Gas and Water Company, and sewage farm would be provided by the South of England Telephone Company at a cost of £40 per year.

Similar schemes were already running in Dover, Folkestone, Maidstone, Chatham, and Eastbourne. Canterbury would be able to link immediately with Dover and Folkestone, with further links to follow.

Plans existed for lines to Faversham and hence to London. The Canterbury barracks had approached the War Office to confirm they wanted to participate.

Several dozen potential private subscribers in the Canterbury area had confirmed their interest.



RELIC: A cable splitting plate in Abbots Barton Walk



Find more memories of the area's history online at

canterburytimes.co.uk/nostalgia

Opposition to the scheme was led by councillor George Furley, a prominent local banker and businessman.

He and his supporters saw the proposals as “a perfect farce” and “an expensive toy”.

They insisted that a “little stationary town like Canterbury” had no need for a telephone, particularly as “you could easily walk from one side of the town to another in 20 minutes”.

Linking the city fire services was unlikely to bring real benefits as the firemen might be asleep and not hear the telephone. The recipient of a call might not know who was calling if they didn't recognise the voice.

The exasperated Alderman Hart retorted: “If Canterbury is little, it is because there are little-minded people in it.”

His opponents resorted to snide personal comments to the effect that the scheme would bring particular advantages to anyone who lived in Dover and had business interests in Canterbury. All who heard the remarks knew full well

that Alderman Hart fitted this description. The city council voted to reject the scheme.

However, Henry was persistent. The tide of history favoured the new technology, and over the coming weeks resistance crumbled. Links to Dover were working by October 1888, and to Ramsgate and Margate by the end of that year.

During the business year 1888/9 the new Canterbury exchange carried 127,808 messages. The telephone age had finally reached Canterbury.

There's little on the ground to remind us of the early years of telephony in Canterbury.

When the GPO arrived in the early 1900s they started erecting their posts and cables but were challenged in law by the city councillors, who felt the GPO were destroying the visual appeal of the historic city centre.

Courts decided cables would be buried beneath the city streets.

Each major split in the underground cables was marked with a cable-splitting plate. Just seven of these survive, and are listed on the CHAS website.

Henry knew nothing of what was to come: first telephone cable to France (1891), mobile phones (1973), cameras on phones (2000), and the rest.

But he'd played his part.