

**Extract from William Cobbett's Rural Rides, first edition 1830**  
**1st September 1823**

From Dimchurch to Hythe you go on the sea-beach, and nearly the same from Hythe to Sandgate, from which last place you come over the hill to Folkestone. But let me look back. Here has been the squandering! Here has been the pauper-making work! Here we see some of these causes that are now sending some farmers to the workhouse and driving others to flee the country or to cut their throats!

I had baited my horse at New Romney, and was coming jogging along very soberly, now looking at the sea, then looking at the cattle, then the corn, when my eye, in swinging round, lighted upon a great round building standing upon the beach. I had scarcely had time to think about what it could be when twenty or thirty others, standing along the coast, caught my eye; and, if any one had been behind me, he might have heard me exclaim, in a voice that made my horse bound, "The Martello Towers by ——!" Oh, Lord! To think that I should be destined to behold these monuments of the wisdom of Pitt and Dundas and Perceval! Good God! Here they are, piles of bricks in a circular form about three hundred feet (guess) circumference at the base, about forty feet high, and about one hundred and fifty feet circumference at the top. There is a door-way, about midway up, in each, and each has two windows. Cannons were to be fired from the top of these things in order to defend the country against the French Jacobins!

I think I have counted along here upwards of thirty of these ridiculous things, which, I dare say, cost five, perhaps ten, thousand pounds each; and one of which was, I am told, sold on the coast of Sussex the other day for two hundred pounds! There is, they say, a chain of these things all the way to Hastings! I dare say they cost millions. But far indeed are these from being all, or half, or a quarter of the squanderings along here. Hythe is half barracks; the hills are covered with barracks; and barracks most expensive, most squandering, fill up the side of the hill. Here is a canal (I crossed it at Appledore) made for the length of thirty miles (from Hythe, in Kent, to Rye, in Sussex) to keep out the French; for those armies who had so often crossed the Rhine and the Danube were to be kept back by a canal, made by Pitt, thirty feet wide at the most! All along the coast there are works of some sort or other; incessant sinks of money; walls of immense dimensions; masses of stone brought and put into piles. Then you see some of the walls and buildings falling down; some that have never been finished. The whole thing, all taken together, looks as if a spell had been, all of a sudden, set upon the workmen; or, in the words of the Scripture, here is the "desolation of abomination, standing in high places." However, all is right. These things were made with the hearty good will of those who are now coming to ruin in consequence of the Debt, contracted for the purpose of making these things! This is all just. The load will come, at last, upon the right shoulders.

Between Hythe and Sandgate (a village at about two miles from Hythe) I first saw the French coast. The chalk cliffs at Calais are as plain to the view as possible, and also the land, which they tell me is near Boulogne.

Folkestone lies under a hill here, as Reigate does in Surrey, only here the sea is open to your right as you come along. The corn is very early here, and very fine. All cut, even the beans; and they will be ready to cart in a day or two. Folkestone is now a little place; probably a quarter part as big as it was formerly. Here is a church one hundred and twenty feet long and fifty feet wide. It is a sort of little Cathedral. The church-yard has evidently been three times as large as it now.

Before I got into Folkestone I saw no less than eighty-four men, women, and boys and girls gleaning or leasing, in a field of about ten acres. The people all along here complain most bitterly of the change of times. The truth is, that the squandered millions are gone! The nation has now to suffer for this squandering. The money served to silence some; to make others bawl; to cause the good to be oppressed; to cause the bad to be exalted; to "crush the Jacobins:" and what is the result? What is the end? The end is not yet come; but as to the result thus far, go, ask the families of those farmers who, after having for so many years threatened to shoot Jacobins, have, in instances not a few, shot themselves! Go, ask the ghosts of Pitt and of Castlereagh what has thus far been the result! Go, ask the Hampshire farmer, who, not many months since, actually blowed out his own brains with one of those very pistols which he had long carried in his Yeomanry Cavalry holsters, to be ready "to keep down the Jacobins and Radicals!" Oh, God! inscrutable are Thy ways; but Thou art just, and of Thy justice what a complete proof have we in the case of these very Martello Towers! They were erected to keep out the Jacobin French, lest they should come and assist the Jacobin English. The loyal people of this coast were fattened by the building of them. Pitt and his loyal Cinque Ports waged interminable war against Jacobins. These very towers are now used to keep these loyal Cinque Ports themselves in order. These towers are now used to lodge men, whose business it is to sally forth, not upon Jacobins, but upon smugglers! Thus, after having sucked up millions of the nation's money, these loyal Cinque Ports are squeezed again: kept in order, kept down, by the very towers which they rejoiced to see rise to keep down the Jacobins.