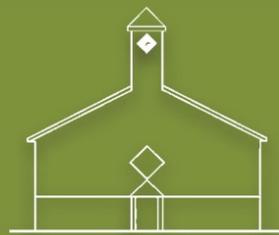


# The Clock Tower



*The Newsletter of the Friends of Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre*

Issue Number 14: May 2009

£2.00; free to members



The new committee, elected at the FOMA AGM held on 15<sup>th</sup> April 2009. Further details on the AGM and the latest FOMA developments can be read inside.

*From left to right: Betty Cole, Membership Secretary, Odette Buchanan, Secretary, Jean Skilling, Treasurer, Tessa Towner, Chairman, Bob Ratcliffe, Committee Member, Dr Sandra Dunster Committee Member, Elaine Gardner, Committee Member, Amanda Thomas, The Clock Tower Editor.*

## *The FOMA AGM*



*Bob Ratcliffe (left), FOMA Committee Member and President of The City of Rochester Society, chats to FOMA President, Russell John Race.*

*Tessa Towner, FOMA Chairman giving her presentation.*



The FOMA AGM was as well attended as ever, and we were delighted that our President, Russell John Race, was able to come. The business section of the meeting was particularly interesting as this has been the most eventful year so far for FOMA. The Heritage Lottery Fund grant of £154,500 was undoubtedly a highlight. However, also mentioned was the success of the new website (<http://www.foma-lsc.org>) which has hundreds of visitors each month, and the increase in volunteers and membership. Members chatted over tea, coffee and biscuits and then settled down to a fantastic presentation by FOMA Chairman, Tessa Towner, giving the background to the Heritage Lottery Fund bid and the celebration that was held on 7<sup>th</sup> January 2009.

## *From the Chairman*

Tessa Towner, Chairman.



With summer approaching, and hopefully some warmer weather, the number of FOMA activities is increasing with various trips, visits and events planned for members, their families and friends. Full details can be found on the Calendar of Forthcoming Events and Exhibitions, and our thanks go to the Events Sub Committee for all their hard work in organising these.

Last month we held our fourth Annual General Meeting, which was attended by around 30 members. I was delighted to give a presentation at the end of the AGM about our grant for the Archives of Great Expectations from the Heritage Lottery Fund and the publicity launch we held in January. Many of those at the AGM had been unable to attend the launch, and particular disappointment was shown by some at having missed the wonderful buffet lunch we had enjoyed that day!

Interviews for a prospective archivist for the Archives of Great Expectations project took place in March. Unfortunately two candidates withdrew, having found employment elsewhere, and the remaining candidate was deemed unsuitable. We have had to re-advertise the post and the closing date for this was 30<sup>th</sup> April 2009. By the time you read this at the end of May, interviews will have taken place, and hopefully by the time of our next issue we should have an archivist in place and the project will be up and running.

## *News and Events*

Odette Buchanan, Secretary



The Annual General Meeting of FOMA went extremely well, thanks to our Chairman, Tessa Towner. Tessa announced the resignation of our Vice Chairman, John Witheridge, who will be missed, however, the rest of the Committee were re-elected en-bloc so you can look forward to us being there for you for another year. Unfortunately the position of Vice Chairman has yet to be filled.

We have a varied and exciting list of exhibitions and events lined up for the year. Time is running out to book a place on the Kingswear Castle trip on Saturday, 13<sup>th</sup> June. The talk on the Cathedral Library should also be very interesting, and a firm date will be available soon but pencil in possible dates in your diaries of either Tuesday, 14<sup>th</sup> or Tuesday, 21<sup>st</sup> July. Saturday, 5<sup>th</sup> September should be fun – a coach trip round ‘Dickens Land’ with tea at Cobham. Hopefully, the Wine and Wisdom Night will be on Friday, 16<sup>th</sup> October but again, this will be confirmed later. Further details can be seen below and please keep checking the website for updates (<http://www.foma-lsc.org>). Please remember, however, that all events must be booked through me, your Secretary, and not the staff at MALSC.

You will see from the repeated appeal from Cllr. Sue Haydock on the Letter’s Page that we must continue to be very pro-active in trying to stop the Council knocking down the Aveling and Porter Offices. There are so many sensible uses to which it could be put but the vision is obscured by the immediate financial considerations of their having to pay rates because the building is unoccupied. Haven’t we got enough blocks of flats casting shadows over the Medway without destroying a local landmark?

We were very pleased to be able to help Medway Council open Eastgate House for a few days for the Sweeps’ Festival. They intend doing this for the Dickens Festival as well. Well done and thank you to those volunteers who helped Norma Crowe dust up the exhibitions for display and well done and thanks to those volunteers who have manned the house on the open days.

The Heritage Lottery Grant and all of the wonderful publicity we received nationwide has created a real boost in FOMA membership and people keep ringing me up wanting to volunteer. We are promised a good summer by the weather people, and let’s hope we are all able to enjoy it to the full and together on the many wonderful FOMA events and trips we have planned!

## *Calendar of Forthcoming Events and Exhibitions*

### MALSC Events

26<sup>th</sup> March to 26<sup>th</sup> May 2009

Chatham Dockyard in the News. Marking the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Dockyard Closure and Events of the Past 200 Years.

An exhibition by MALSC.

Exhibitions are free to view.

28<sup>th</sup> May to 7<sup>th</sup> July 2009

A Pictorial History of Shorts and Associates: 100 Years of Innovation.

An exhibition by MALSC and volunteers.

Exhibitions are free to view.

9<sup>th</sup> June 2009, 7.30 pm

A talk by Shorts Brothers' Commemoration Society and MALSC:

High Flyers: Short Brothers on Film. Historic Footage of Short Brothers' Aviation History.

Talks are £3 for members £4 non-members.

24<sup>th</sup> June 2009, 10.00 am – 12.30 pm

**and**

1<sup>st</sup> July 2009, 10.00 am – 12.30 pm

A two-part course by Vince Rogers (KFHS):

Family History: Digging Deeper into Resources on the Internet.

£5 per session.

9<sup>th</sup> July to 8<sup>th</sup> September 2009

Gundulph: The Builder Bishop.

An exhibition by the City of Rochester Society.

Exhibitions are free to view.

10<sup>th</sup> September to 31<sup>st</sup> October 2009

The Muslim Community of Medway.

An exhibition by MALSC, FOMA and the Muslim community.

Exhibitions are free to view.

13<sup>th</sup> October 2009, 7.30 pm

A talk by MALSC:

Medway's Muslim Communities: Looking Forward, Looking Back.

Talks are £3 for members £4 non-members.

16<sup>th</sup> November to 8<sup>th</sup> December 2009

Not Forgotten: Men from Medway in the Great War.

An exhibition by MALSC.

Exhibitions are free to view.

17<sup>th</sup> November 2009, 7.30 pm

A talk by Mick de Caville:

Men from Medway in the Great War.

Talks are £3 for members £4 non-members.

10<sup>th</sup> December 2009 to 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2010  
Kent and Pas de Calais: Our Shared History.  
An exhibition by the Cross Channel Community Network.  
Exhibitions are free to view.

Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> December 2009, 10.00 am to 12.00 noon  
Mince Pie Day  
Come along and meet the staff, enjoy seasonal refreshments, view the exhibitions and book sale!  
at 2.30pm  
A talk by Lee Ault:  
The Victorian Lady: An Illustrated Presentation.  
Talks are £3 for members £4 non-members. **BOOKING ESSENTIAL.**

**Unless otherwise indicated, all the above are held at the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre, (MALSC) Civic Centre, Strood, Rochester, Kent ME2 4AU. Further information is available from MALSC; please telephone 01634 332714 to book.**

**Please note: You may be aware that Medway Council is being relocated to Gun Wharf. This move does not include the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre and until further notice, we are still to be found in the Clock Tower building.**

## FOMA Events

13<sup>th</sup> June Kingswear Castle Boat Trip, down and upstream £26 (concessions £24).  
Departs noon from Chatham's Historic Dockyard. **Early booking is essential.**

18<sup>th</sup> June 5.30 pm  
Guided tour of Restoration House  
£7.50

**There are limited places for this FOMA excursion and early booking is essential. However, please note that Restoration House is open on the afternoon of Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> July for those who cannot get to see it in normal opening hours. It will also open all day on the Saturday of the Dickens festival at the end of May.**

Either 14<sup>th</sup> or 21<sup>st</sup> July, 7.30 pm  
Date to be confirmed – please consult the FOMA website (<http://www.foma-lsc.org>). for further updates.  
A talk on the Cathedral library by the Archdeacon. To be held at MALSC

5<sup>th</sup> September, 2.00 pm  
*Dickensland* tour followed by tea at Cobham  
A coach tour round the places associated with Charles Dickens in the Medway area, led by Bob Ratcliffe.  
Please consult the FOMA website (<http://www.foma-lsc.org>). for further updates.

16<sup>th</sup> October 7.30  
Wine and Wisdom Quiz Night  
£5  
Date and venue to be confirmed. Please consult the FOMA website (<http://www.foma-lsc.org>). for further updates.

Please book for ALL FOMA events through the FOMA Secretary:  
Odette Buchanan 72 Jersey Rd, Strood, ME2 3BY; odette\_buchanan@yahoo.co.uk; 01634  
718231.



The Friends of Broomhill in Strood invite you to attend their

## **Summer Solstice Funday**

**Sunday, 21st June, 2009, 2.00 pm - 4.00 pm at the top of the Hill.  
Come and join in the fun!**

See the teddy bears parachuting - help create a human sundial - have your face painted - dip into the Tombola - get a Tarot reading - plan your future - have a space-hop round the hill to solve the quiz - participate in the judging of the model Messerschmitt planes - eat an ice cream while browsing the many stalls including the Women's Institute, Neighbourhood Police, Strood Gardening Club, Kent Wildlife Trust, RSPB, etc. etc.

All the while music from Andy and his group with breaks for the Jade Street Dancers' performance and much, much more...

Medway Museums and Library Service is planning to stage some exhibitions previously shown at MALSC in Eastgate House during, and either side of, various festivals in the area.

**If you can volunteer a couple of hours to help supervise these, please e-mail Elaine Gardner at [lanagardner@fsmail.net](mailto:lanagardner@fsmail.net) for further details.**

Those planned are:

Dickensland Then and Now - for the Dickens Festival

Royal Engineers - for Veterans' Day at end of June

Shorts Brothers - for the Fuse Festival

1000 years of Medway History - for Heritage Open days in early September

Victorian Way of Life/Victorian Christmas - for Dickens Christmas festival.

We are all keen to see Eastgate House open to the public as much as possible so we hope that you can help by giving us a little of your time.

## *Readers' Letters*

*We welcome letters and emails from readers with their comments. If you have anything you would like to say please write to: Mrs Amanda Thomas, Editor, The Clock Tower, 72 Crabtree Lane, Harpenden, Hertfordshire, AL5 5NS or email at amanda@ajthomas.com*

This letter was originally printed in Issue 13 of *The Clock Tower*.

9<sup>th</sup> February 2009

### **HELP TO SAVE STROOD'S HERITAGE!**

Dear Clock Tower Readers,

Many of you will be aware of Medway Council's plans to redevelop the old Civic Centre site in Strood. The eventual plan is to demolish all the buildings on the site and to redevelop it with a mixture of uses. The demolition originally included the Aveling and Porter building designed by local architect George Bond [see *The Clock Tower*, Issue 10, May 2008], built in 1903, and also the older gabled building, used for some time as the Mayor's Parlour, but originally occupied by Charles Dickens' doctor. Strood does not have many buildings of note, and none so strategically placed along the river front as this building. Its loss would be a sad demise of a fine building, although not grand enough, apparently, for English Heritage to grant it listed status. Nevertheless, it is an important building locally, serving as the offices of a firm whose name and reputation was world-wide in the field of steam traction and later engineering. There are many who think the buildings will make a superb Industrial Museum for the Medway Valley. Some Councillors are calling for more museum space, and following representations, the buildings have a reprieve for the time being. Medway has aspirations of being a City of Culture, and culture and heritage is one of its core values. But there are a number of Councillors who are not aware of the significance of these buildings nor of the opportunity that is now presented to make a first class presentation of a world class industrial past.

Make your opposition to the demolition known and support for an alternative use known by emailing the leader of the council, Rodney Chambers at [Rodney.chambers@medway.gov.uk](mailto:Rodney.chambers@medway.gov.uk) . In addition contact local industrial archaeologist Jim Preston at [james.m.preston@btinternet.com](mailto:james.m.preston@btinternet.com) or on 07712 618004 so that objectors can form themselves into a body of likeminded people with a will to save the buildings.

Cllr Sue Haydock,  
FOMA Vice President and Medway Council Representative.

## About The Clock Tower

*The Clock Tower* is the quarterly journal produced and published by the Friends of Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre (FOMA), <http://www.foma-lsc.org/index.html>.

### Editorial deadlines

The first Monday (or Tuesday when a Bank Holiday occurs) of February, May, August and November. Articles, letters, photos and any information to be considered for inclusion in the journal must be received before this date by the Editor, Mrs Amanda Thomas, 72 Crabtree Lane, Harpenden, AL5 5NS, Hertfordshire; [amanda@ajthomas.com](mailto:amanda@ajthomas.com)

**The copy deadline for Issue 15 of *The Clock Tower* is Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> August 2009.**

### Publication date

The third Wednesday following the editorial deadline.

The Clock Tower is printed by Ray Maisey, Rabbit Hutch Printers, 106 Charles Drive, Cuxton, Kent, ME2 1DU; telephone: 01634 294655; fax: 01634 723510; email: [Ray@Rabbithutchprinters.com](mailto:Ray@Rabbithutchprinters.com)

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### Front Cover Accreditations and Website Information

The logo for *The Clock Tower* was designed by Bob Ratcliffe.

The banner design (incorporating the logo) and the title *The Clock Tower* were designed by Alexander Thomas.

*The Clock Tower* is also available on: <http://www.foma-lsc.org/newsletter.html>

### Further Information

Information about the Friends of Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre (FOMA) can be obtained from the Secretary, Odette Buchanan: 72 Jersey Road, Rochester, ME2 3PE. Telephone: 01634 718231; email: [odette\\_buchanan@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:odette_buchanan@yahoo.co.uk)

FOMA membership enquiries should be directed to the Membership Secretary, Betty Cole, 25 Elm Avenue, Chatham, Kent ME4 6ER. Telephone: 01634 316509; email: [bettycole@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:bettycole@blueyonder.co.uk)

Further information on the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre can be obtained on the MALSC CityArk website: <http://cityark.medway.gov.uk/> or by writing to Medway Archives Office, Civic Centre, Strood, Rochester, Kent ME2 4AU. Telephone +44 (0)1634 332714; fax +44 (0)1634 297060; email: [malsc@medway.gov.uk](mailto:malsc@medway.gov.uk)

## *The Committee*

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picketywitch@blueyonder.co.uk

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Jean Skilling: 15 Port Close, Lordswood, Chatham, ME5 8DU, Kent.  
jean.skilling@blueyonder.co.uk

### Secretary

Odette Buchanan: 72 Jersey Road, Rochester, ME2 3PE, Kent.  
odette\_buchanan@yahoo.co.uk

### Membership Secretary

Betty Cole: 25 Elm Avenue, Chatham, ME4 6ER, Kent.  
bettycole@blueyonder.co.uk

### Members

Dr Sandra Dunster: S.A.Dunster@gre.ac.uk

Elaine Gardner: lanagardner@fsmail.net

Bob Ratcliffe: 12 King Edward Road, Rochester, ME1 1UB, Kent.

Richard Stoneham: rpstoneham@talktalk.net

### The Clock Tower Editor

Amanda Thomas: 72 Crabtree Lane, Harpenden, AL5 5NS, Hertfordshire.  
amanda@ajthomas.com

## *Archives Update*

Alison Cable, Borough Archivist



I am very pleased to report that MALSC is now fully staffed. Catharina Clement and Nicola Pratt have now joined the team as Archive and Local Studies Assistants. Our new Saturday assistant, Jenny McDonogh, has also now taken up her post.

The Heritage Lottery Fund project was officially launched in January with a hugely successful PR campaign. We interviewed for the post of Project Archivist in early March but were unable to make an appointment. We are hoping that our next round of interviews on 27 May will be more successful and that we will have a new project archivist in post by the start of July.

We experienced problems with the CityArk website during March and April which has served to highlight the necessity of having an archive database that can be monitored and updated by our own IT team. Our external administrator was not completely certain what had caused the problem, but nevertheless he eventually managed to make the public interface accessible again - much to the relief of our remote users who had been unable to access the online parish registers. We are, unfortunately, still having some problems with the staff administration side of CityArk, and I foresee that in the medium to long term we will probably have to transfer all the data to a new system. In the meantime, we are working with our own IT team to try and stabilise CityArk and ensure that it is fit for purpose over the next two to three years.

We have had yet another busy year in the search room with an average of 1,307 visitors per month. It was particularly challenging for the staff during the months when they were without an archivist and so understaffed, but you will not be surprised to hear that they coped admirably.

2009 is already proving to be a busy year: I will be supervising the project archivist and overseeing the Heritage Lottery Fund project; I will be undertaking work to improve the current status of CityArk; and I will also be involved in the project to identify and explore possible new sites for MALSC.....these are three of my objectives for this year! .....

*Alison Cable is reviewing the Recent Acquisitions column which will return in a future issue.*

## *Short Brothers' Commemoration Society and 100 Years of Flight*

Norma Crowe, Local Studies Librarian.



*Norma joined the Studies Centre staff in 1995. As a Local Studies Librarian she has responsibility for the printed collections at MALSC, which includes the purchase, care and promotion of printed resources about Medway and its environs, such as books, pamphlets, dissertations, journals, newspapers, maps, photographs and paper ephemera. Working with Archive colleagues, Local Studies staff promote the MALSC holdings by a programme of exhibitions and events and encourage further interest by holding short courses and by working with schools. The Local Studies team also works closely with local and family historians in Medway, who offer valuable support to MALSC services, by volunteering and sharing their expertise. Offers of assistance in collecting and preserving all aspects of Medway's rich history are always welcome. Norma is also Chairman of Short Brothers' Commemoration Society.*

This year we are celebrating many events connected with the birth of fixed wing flight. On 1<sup>st</sup> May 2009 the Fleet Air Arm marked 100 years of Naval flying, with a moving ceremony at Eastchurch. On 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> May 100 years of flying, and the centenary of the meeting of the Wright Brothers with the Short Brothers and members of the Aero Club was celebrated at Muswell Manor. Further events will take place in July to mark the importance of the Isle of Sheppey in the early history of flying here in the UK.

In 1914 the Short Brothers moved much of their production from Sheppey to Rochester, where the main works were sited until 1948. The seaplane works played an important role in the industrial life of the Medway Towns at the time, but until recently there was nothing left to mark this brief but important era.

Short Brothers Commemoration Society was formed in 1997, and many FOMA members will recall my article about the Society which was published in the second issue of *The Clock Tower* in June 2006. The objective of the society was to raise awareness of the pioneering designs of the Short Brothers. The majority of Society members had worked for Shorts at some time in their life; many at Rochester. Sadly many of the members have passed away in the last five years, and those who remain are becoming too frail to attend meetings. The time has come to wind up our small but important society. Material collected by the Society (which includes photographs, books, plans and information files) will remain at MALSC, or be offered to other repositories with an interest in aviation history.

It is fitting and rewarding that the Society was able to finance a commemorative plaque, (see issue 12 of *The Clock Tower*) which celebrates the achievements of the Short Brothers and their workforce in Kent. The maroon ceramic plaque was unveiled on a glorious afternoon last September, and is located in a prominent position close to the site of the Factory's main gate.

Over the last 12 years the Society has fulfilled its aim, and can be justly proud of the camaraderie, the reminiscence work, the outings, the Society's collections and its Journal. Journal number 10 was the last and one of the best, thanks in no small part to its editor Don Bell.

From 28<sup>th</sup> May to 7<sup>th</sup> July the history of Shorts and early aviation in Kent will be celebrated with an exhibition at Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre. We hope many of you will come to our film evening on 9<sup>th</sup> June, when the exploits of early aviators and the endeavours of the Short Brothers will be on show.



*The ceremony at Shorts Reach Esplanade, Rochester, on Friday 26<sup>th</sup> September 2008. Local Studies Librarian, Norma Crowe, in her capacity as Chairman of the Shorts Brothers Commemoration Society, welcomed Rt. Hon Lord Brabazon of Tara who unveiled the plaque, and the Mayor, Cllr David Carr.*

## *A Short History of the Muslim Community in Medway*

Irina Shub, Local Studies Librarian, Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre



*Irina joined the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre team in 2005. Originally from St. Petersburg (formerly Leningrad) in Russia, she has always been fascinated by the English language and history. Throughout her career as a librarian, she has worked in various libraries, and when she and her family moved from London to Medway she applied for the position of a Local Studies Librarian at MALSC.*

*This article, the second of two, is based on three sources: a handful of records found in the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre, items from the local press, and interviews with various representatives from the Muslim community.*

### *Major Immigration*

After the Second World War, a shortage of labour in Britain brought a large influx of Indians soon after their country gained independence and was partitioned in 1947. More than 60,000 arrived before 1955. The new arrivals drove buses, worked in foundries or textile factories; later immigrants opened corner shops or ran post offices. The flow of Indian immigrants peaked between 1965 and 1972, boosted in particular by Idi Amin's decision to expel all 50,000 Gujarati Indians from Uganda. Around 30,000 of these migrated to the UK.

The Medway of the 1950s, like many other parts of the country, saw an influx of Muslims settling in the area. These numbers were definitely substantial although it is almost impossible to establish the precise figure. The only source is the local newspapers, but these as usual referred to those few immigrants who got into trouble, ignoring the social contribution of the ordinary Muslim population. There are a few exceptions to this. For example, Mr S.M. Aly, an 'Indian Eye Specialist' (see newspaper cutting) regularly advertised in the Medway newspapers in the years following World War Two.

His premises at 147 Chatham High Street were fortuitously next door to Boots the Chemist. Mr Aly was following in a longstanding tradition. Indian oculists had practised extensively in Britain during the late Victorian period, including a practitioner in Canterbury Street, Gillingham. Another exception, and something of a pioneer in catering circles, was Hassan Ahmed Ashmawy, a café proprietor in Rainham High Street in the post-war period.

### *Burials*

In the 1950s the Pakistan Welfare Association was formed. As more Muslims resided in the area they needed authority to bury their deceased in the Muslim tradition. There are no existing records of Muslim funerals in the 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The first one took place in 1921 and was reported in the *Chatham Observer*: Nur Mohammed Kabu, serving with the Royal Fleet Auxiliary, was buried in the Woodlands Cemetery, Gillingham. The funeral was conducted by a visiting Imam and attended by several friends. In 1962 the Pakistan Welfare Association applied to Chatham Borough Council for a section in the burial grounds at Chatham. Permission was granted on 5<sup>th</sup> February 1963, allocating five grave spaces each 9ft by 4ft with a total capacity for 20 burials and with the longitudinal axis of graves from north to south, facing Mecca. Today the Muslim community is able to conduct its burial services in two cemeteries – Palmerston Road, Chatham and Woodlands cemetery in Gillingham.

**NEGLECT MAY MEAN  
PERMANENTLY IMPAIRED EYES  
DO NOT DELAY ANY  
LONGER, CONSULT MR. ALY  
INDIAN EYE SPECIALIST  
(Phone: Chatham 3048)**



The following are a few from innumerable cases Mr. Aly has successfully treated during his practice of 14 years.

**Mr. R. Pettitt, "Edgeville"**  
Albert-road, Chatham, Kent. 7th  
December, 1950—Dear Mr. Aly, I  
would like to express my thanks  
and appreciation for what you  
have done for my wife's eyes, for  
years she has suffered from  
CONJUNCTIVITIS and bad  
EYESIGHT but now she is com-  
pletely cleared of all trouble and  
I can honestly say that it has been  
your treatment that has cured it.

**Mr. F. G. Middleton, 10 Shake-  
speare-road, Gillingham, Kent.**—  
Dear Mr. Aly, I wish to tender  
thanks to you for the great  
improvement in my wife's eye  
from your treatment in just a few  
weeks. She had a stroke 12 months  
ago which completely closed one  
eye due to drooping of the upper  
eyelid and has remained so (in  
spite of attending other treatment  
for months) until you started  
treating her eye and lid. Now the  
eye is already half open.

**S. M. ALY**  
INDIAN EYE SPECIALIST  
147 HIGH St., CHATHAM  
(Next to Boots the Chemist)

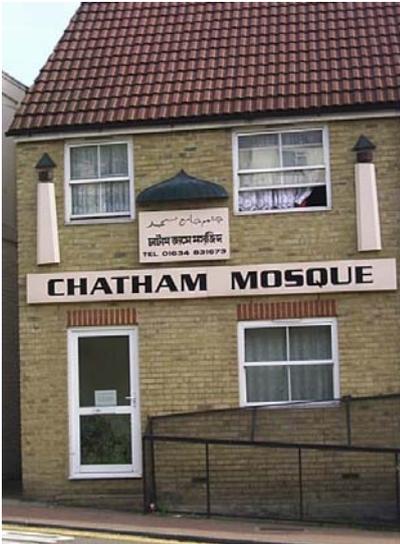
Consulting Hours: Every Tues-  
day 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. and 3 to  
8 p.m., and every Saturday 2 to  
6 p.m. Phone: Chatham 3048,  
other days at 856 High-road,  
Tottenham, London, N.17. Phone  
Tottenham 5889. Also at  
Plumstead High-street, London,  
S.E.18. Phone Woolwich 2964.  
Established 1938. )



*The grave of Nur Mohammed Kabu, Woodlands Cemetery, Gillingham. Note that the name on the headstone reads Mur Mohammed Kalod; collection 1, Shub.*

## Religious Practice

An equally important need has been for a place of worship. Hadji Feroz Khan of the Gillingham Mosque recalled that in 1964 members of the community would congregate in the cellar of one of the houses in Otway Street in Chatham. In time this grew too small, and they hired an upstairs room of the *White Horse* public house on Chatham Hill. This arrangement was not successful as many members considered worshipping in a room over a pub inappropriate.



*Kent Islamic Centre, Chatham Hill Mosque; collection 1, Shub.*

On 15<sup>th</sup> December 1968 the following fifteen members of the congregation formed the UK Islamic Mission committee, which opened a subscription to fund a permanent mosque belonging to the community: Awarat-u-Allah Khan, Bashir Ahmed Mir, Feroz Khan, Sabir Hussain, Ghulom Mustafa Malik, Iftahar Ali Khan, Mumtaz Ali Khan, Zataz-Uddin Mirza, Mussarat Bint Noor Din, Mushtaq Hussain, Shafqrat Ali Khan, Arshad Amed, Ashfaq Ahmed Shamin, Ghulam Mayguddin, and Rustam Ali.

In the early 1970s a suitable building was found in Canterbury Street, Gillingham, vacated by the A'Becket Club. This building had served various organisations over many years. It had been the British Legion HQ in the 1920s, a Gillingham Borough club in the 1930s, a social club for Borough Council employees up to 1961, then the Standard Kolster Club, a social and athletics club for Kolster factory employees, and last from 1967 the A'Becket Irish social club. On obtaining permission, the building became the Gillingham Mosque and in 1976 the organisation was renamed, The Kent Muslim Welfare Association.



*Kent Muslim Welfare Association, Gillingham Mosque; collection 1, Shub.*

### *Inter-Communal and Educational Initiatives*

Today, besides providing prayer facilities they are also actively involved in developing partnerships and initiatives to improve community cohesion in Medway. The partners include Medway Council, Kent Police, Kent Fire and Rescue Service, the universities in Medway, the Medway Interfaith Group and more. They have various educational programmes in place, such as a homework club and lessons in classical Arabic, especially the Qur'an, as well as Urdu and Bengali, two of the important spoken languages. A recent Ofsted report, which surveyed the teaching activities, highly commended the achievements and efforts by the school as well as its contributions to local education. It also participates in outreach work with the local schools and receives school visits allowing non-Muslim children to learn about Islam in the framework of the National Curriculum.

### *New Premises and Centres in Chatham and Gillingham*

As Gillingham is an inconvenient distance for Muslims living in Chatham and Rochester, Chatham Hill Mosque was established in 1977. The members of the community, consisting mainly of people from Bangladesh, formerly East Pakistan, obtained permission to use the premises at 22b Chatham Hill as a mosque. Ironically, in 1937 the building had been used as the HQ of the British Union of Fascists and National Socialists, but after the war became known as Victory Hall and was probably used as a dance hall. From 1955 these premises, along with number 22a had been taken over by the British Red Cross Society. The latter building was demolished in 2004 and replaced with new premises, which now houses the Kent Islamic Centre.

In 2000 the Dale Street Mosque was established on the site of several dilapidated terraced houses. The premises at 77 Dale Street now constitute the address of the Chatham and Rochester Muslim Trust accommodating the Local Muslim Centre.



*Chatham and Rochester Muslim Trust, Dale Street Mosque; collection 1, Shub*

### *Visitors from the East – Training, Links and Awareness*

After the Second World War, Medway became a place for visitors from abroad seeking training in security and administration. In 1950 three police officers, two of them members of the Benghazi police force, Chief Inspector Ibrahim Mukahal and Inspector Rajab Obeida visited Chatham to gain an insight into British police methods. In 1956 Medway was the training base for a fire fighter from Egypt, Lt Ez Lel Din Ahmed Bahgat. Today, the local Kent Muslim Welfare Association provides Muslim awareness training for various institutions, which take part on a regular basis.

### *Cultural Diversity and the Economic Impact in Medway*

Today approximately 600 Muslims permanently reside in Medway. They have their roots in Pakistan, India, Malaysia, Arabia, Indonesia, Africa, Algeria, Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Kosovo and Egypt. There are also some converts to Islam, including those of English descent, and as a result an impressive array of different cultures co-exist represented by the many languages spoken: Arabic, Bengali, English, French, Gujarati, Indonesian, Malay, Maly Alam, Punjabi, Swahili, and Urdu. Medway's Muslim community contributes hugely to the local economy and provides a wide professional cadre: GPs, lawyers, barristers, magistrates, councillors, dentists, pharmacists, accountants and consultants in the Medway Maritime Hospital. Local businesses include numerous Indian restaurants, run mainly by people from Bangladesh, three Halal butchers, a taxi firm and various convenience stores and corner shops.

*This article was written in conjunction with Brian Joyce, author of several books on Kent History, including the Chatham Scandal, Dumb Show and Noise, and Chatham and the Medway Towns, A History and Celebration. Special thanks also to Mr Anwar Khan, Project Co-ordinator, KMWA, for his indispensable help, Shaffiq Din, Vice-Chairman of the Medway Inter-Faith Action Group, and Rev Canon Alan Amos for their first work on the subject.*

## *Edwin Harris – Recollections of Rochester*

Janet Knight,  
Local Studies, The Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre



*Janet Knight has worked at the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre for over 16 years. She started work as assistant to Pat Salter and later transferred to Local Studies, working with Norma Crowe. Pat Salter's interest in Edwin Harris fired Janet's own enthusiasm and she has become another eager member of the Edwin fan club. Janet is often heard to say, "I wonder what Edwin has to say on the matter..."*

*In this issue, Janet reproduces Edwin Harris' thoughts on the so-called Star Corner Cousins from his 1930 work, Recollections of Rochester.*

### Drumming for Recruits

'At one time all proclamations were made at Star Corner, but in recent years the ceremony has taken place at the top of Star Hill instead.

Another old custom that has died out is one which used to be known as "crying a regiment down." A drum-and-fife band of a line regiment newly arrived and taking up its quarters in Chatham Garrison would march as far as Star Corner, halt and play a tune. Then a sergeant would step forward and read a statement to the effect that the colonel and officers of the regiment would not be responsible for any debts contracted in their name without their authority, etc. Today a three-line advertisement in *The Observer* answers the purpose.

In days gone by there was not so much talk about reducing the Army and the Navy as at the present time. It was customary to send out a drum-and-fife band, and I have heard such a band playing lively tunes. When a crowd gathered a recruiting sergeant with coloured ribbons on his cap would talk about the glories of a soldier's life and would then enlist recruits.

This custom was dropped out for some years and it was not until the Great War that I encountered it once again. This time a brass band took part, stopping at the entrance to Corporation Street. An innovation was the carrying of a large Union Jack, which was gently waved, and an appeal for recruits was made by an officer.

Two well known local men who were casually employed, when waiting for a job to come along used to take their stand on the corner on opposite sides of the road.

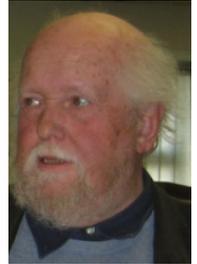
One would lean against the Red Lion and the other against the Star. So regular were they in this habit that they acquired the name of the Star Corner Cousins. I have heard it related that a regiment going to India took a mock farewell of them as they marched past, and on their return five years later they found the Cousins there. The soldiers vowed that they had been there all the time. If ever there was doubt about the relationship of any one person to another in this locality the question was usually settled by saying, "They're Star Corner Cousins."



*The Star Pub (facing) and on the opposite corner, the Red Lion pub, circa 1910. From the Medway Archives and Local Studies Local Studies collection.*

# *Strood to Canterbury 150*

Bob Ratcliffe



*Bob Ratcliffe is a retired architect. He is President of The City of Rochester Society and a local historian; Bob is also a FOMA committee member.*

*This article, the last of a series of three, is based on the commemorative exhibition held at the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre (MALSC) in August to September 2008.*

## *Part Three*

### *Nationalisation*

The Labour government of 1945 nationalised the four main companies with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> January 1948, our line becoming a part of the Southern Region of British Railways. Prior to this, at the Annual General Meeting in 1946, the Southern's directors announced their plans to continue with electrification, with East Kent being reached by 1951. Nationalisation in 1948 put paid to such plans, and electric services did not reach the coast until 1959. The most obvious early change resulting from nationalisation was that of the colour of the rolling stock. Our green trains changed to red and cream, and the malachite green locomotives took on a darker Brunswick shade, though the electric stock remained green. Plans for further electrification were shelved and would not reappear until the Modernisation Plan of 1955.

The great floods of January 1953 caused havoc to the Thanet services, the line being washed away on either side of Whitstable. Within a few weeks the service was restored by running over a newly laid spur at Canterbury, but it was to be several months before the direct route was reopened. This spur followed the original link proposed by the old East Kent Railway in 1853 but never undertaken. It did later have three lives. Its first was during World War One, and it was re-laid in the Second World War, only to be lifted again in

1951. After its reinstatement as the diversionary route in 1953, it was finally lifted in September 1954.

Bulleid's West Country and Battle of Britain Pacifics, together with his new coaching stock, had appeared in Kent in 1946, and by 1953 there was an amount of new stock, the ancient SE&CR birdcage sets being replaced by 3-coach sets of Mark 1 standard coaches. There were also a number of new standard locomotives, and from 1957 some of the rebuilt version of the Bulleid Pacific.

The 1955 Plan included the elimination of steam throughout the country, and the development of electric and diesel power. Electrification of most of the remaining lines in Kent was to be completed by 1961, with the old LCDR route to Thanet and Dover being included in the first phase, by 1959. New works to the line and the infrastructure meant that the service declined over the intervening years, with much bad press which reached its peak with the Cannon Street signal box fire and the Lewisham disaster in 1957.

Between Strood and Faversham the main civil engineering work was the quadrupling of the line between Rainham and Newington, replacing the loops at Chatham that were removed to enable the platforms to be lengthened to take twelve-coach trains. New signal boxes at Rochester,

Sittingbourne and Faversham replaced ten manual boxes and all the semaphore signals were replaced with colour lights. There was also the matter of laying the conductor rail and building substations and line paralleling huts, all to be done while a service was maintained.

15<sup>th</sup> June 1959 saw the introduction of the regular service of hourly electric expresses from Victoria to Gillingham, dividing there into portions for Ramsgate and Dover. The North Kent semi-fast was extended from Gillingham to Ramsgate, and the similar service from Victoria was extended to Sheerness. There was also a Sheerness to Dover service and a Sheerness to Sittingbourne shuttle - Sheerness had never had it so good! All these services had new rolling stock, for at a stroke the old stock and all traces of steam had been swept away.

Freight was in the hands of a fleet of diesel locomotives and there were some electric locomotives to handle the Golden Arrow and Night Ferry, together with inter-regional workings and parcels trains, though these were soon to be phased out.

The Beeching Report of 1963 had no effect on the line, though the Sheerness service was reduced and there have been other modifications to the timetable over the years. 1964 saw a re-branding of the image, with national colours of blue and grey, or just blue for suburban stock.

The old LCDR bridge finally succumbed to the scrap metal man in 1968, after 41 years of disuse, and its place was taken by a new road bridge, opened by Princess Margaret in 1970. The approach road at the Strood end saw the demolition of the old Rochester Bridge Station, closed as far back as 1917 and latterly, used as a drawing office for Winget's, manufacturers of concrete mixers. The letters from the station front were saved and can now be seen in Rochester's Guildhall Museum.

In 1985 the line was re-branded as part of London-South East and some of the stock was repainted in an attractive brown, orange and grey livery soon to be known as Jaffa Cake. Less than two years later another reorganisation under *Sectorisation* found our line becoming a part of Network Southeast and the rolling stock appearing in a patriotic, though somewhat harsh, red, white and blue. After 135 years of carriages with hinged doors, trains with sliding doors were introduced in 1993, and by 2006 the entire fleet had been renewed. Meanwhile, after fifty years as a national venture, our line was returned to private ownership in 1998.

### *The Line Today*

The tale of the past ten years is a complex and difficult one. Under the 1993 Privatisation Act, the railway infrastructure was separated from the trains. The infrastructure (the track, signalling and station buildings), were originally under the control of Railtrack, but this firm failed to satisfy the government's requirements and were summarily dismissed. A new firm, Network Rail is now in charge.

To provide and run the trains, tenders were invited and the company that won the contract for Kent's trains was to be known as Connex South East. Under the Act, the Train Operating Company (TOC) does not own its trains. These are owned by one of three leasing companies from whom the TOC hires them. By 2003 Connex South East had also failed to satisfy the Office of the Rail Regulator, and the operation reverted to a semi-nationalised one, South Eastern Trains, until it was possible to obtain new tenders. The winner this time was the Govia Group, who now operate our trains under their London and South-Eastern Railway banner. This seems to have been shortened to Southeastern, a title that would make James Staats Forbes turn in his grave!

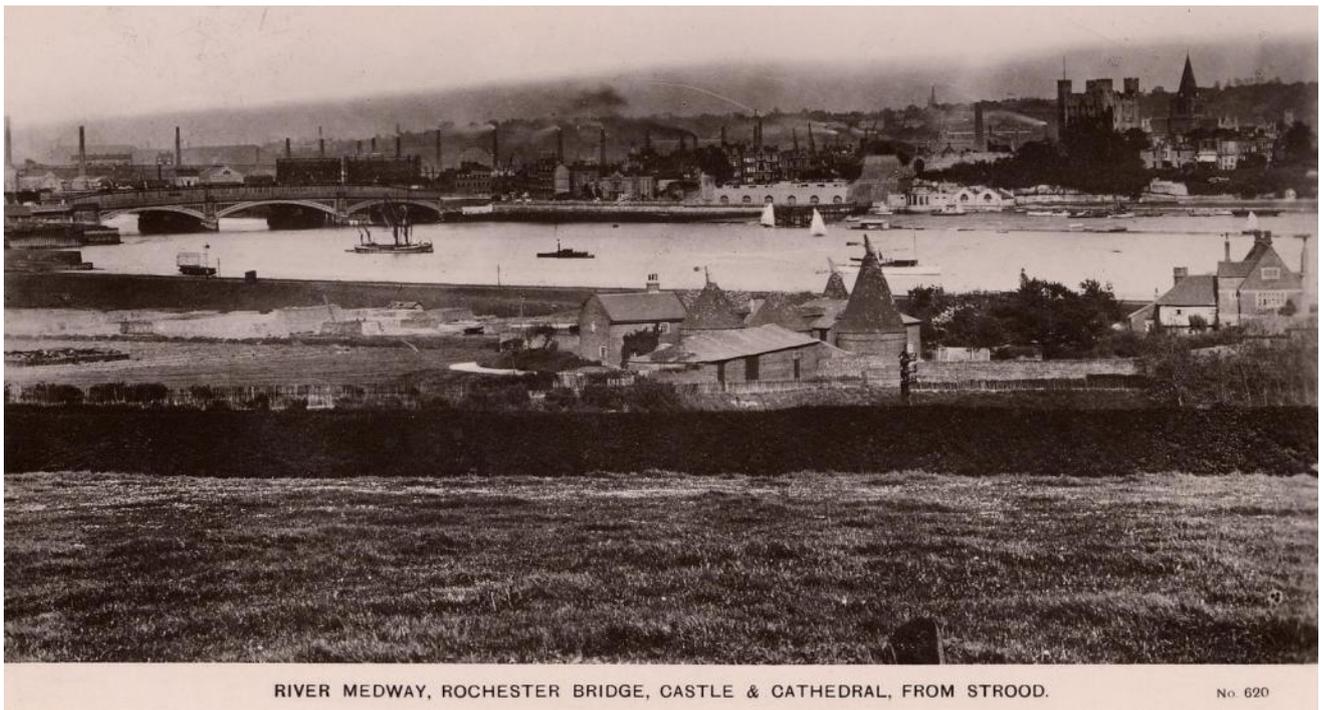
So how does our line stand one hundred and fifty years on? Network Rail is finishing a major overhaul and repainting of the SER's bridge of 1892, all undertaken without disrupting the service.

They did disrupt the service, however, when the tunnel from Strood to Higham was closed for a year from January 2004 for re-lining, but that is outside our story.

The rolling stock hired by L&SER has now entirely replaced the 'slam door' stock, 375 Electrostars provide the express service and 465/6 Networkers the stopping services. All are fitted with sliding doors, and it is no longer possible to lean out of the window or to leave the train before it comes to a complete standstill.

As to the future, 2009 will see the introduction of the Integrated Kent Franchise with a domestic service over High Speed 1 (HS1) to St Pancras International. As I write this in August 2008, four of the 395 Javelin sets are already on trial and, in their dark blue livery, are bringing a new concept to rail travel to Kent. One of the routes on which they will be found is that from Faversham and the Medway Towns to Gravesend, where they will join HS1 at Ebbsfleet International for a fast run to St Pancras International. (See *Editor's Note*)

It is sad that the opportunity to re-align the line from Chatham to Strood tunnel has not been taken as a part of the Rochester Riverside Regeneration scheme. The sins of the fathers are still to be inflicted upon their children, and the 395s will have to follow the twisting route of the old EKR through Rochester and over the Medway to follow the Toomer Loop to Strood, but their ride should certainly be better than Forbes' old four-wheelers!



RIVER MEDWAY, ROCHESTER BRIDGE, CASTLE & CATHEDRAL, FROM STROOD.

No. 620

*Temple Farm and Manor, Strood.*

*From the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre Couchman Collection, ref. DE402/12/45. Postcard photograph entitled River Medway, Rochester Bridge, castle and cathedral, from Strood, comprising view of part of Strood and Rochester, looking east, showing in foreground left to right, embankment carrying South East and Chatham Railway, Temple Brick Works, embankment of South East and Chatham Railway (North Kent Line), Temple Farm and oast houses and Temple Manor House, in middle-ground Rochester Bridge, River Medway (Town Reach), sailing barges, yachts and other vessels and in distance, also left to right, factories and chimneys on Frindsbury Peninsula, gas tanks at Gas House Road, Rochester, Bridge House, Rochester Esplanade (Crown Inn, Castle Club and Bridge Chamber), Rochester Castle (north-west bastion, western curtain wall and castle keep), Watts' Charity Swimming Baths, Holy Trinity Church, Brompton, Rochester Cathedral and Satis House, Boley Hill. On rear, message from W. [-] to a Mrs. [M.?] Scarborough, Soar Mill Lane, Broughton Astley, Leicestershire, discussing mail contact. Published by W. Naylar, Northgate Series, Rochester. Couchman's accompanying notes pertain to Temple Brick Works supplying bricks*

*for building of British Museum, Great Russell Street, London WC1, and source for this as being Henry Smetham in a talk given to Rochester and District Natural History Society in 1926 \*. Postmarked 25 August 1911. p.45*

## Editor's Note

On 7<sup>th</sup> May 2009, the BBC News website (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/8036851.stm>) reported: 'Some rail services are to be axed when new high-speed trains are introduced in parts of south-east England.'

The launch of *javelin* trains on commuter routes in December will force the withdrawal of a small number of services, train firm Southeastern said. They include Maidstone East via London Bridge to Cannon Street and Charing Cross. Other timetables will change. The new 140mph trains will run from Ashford in Kent into London using the Channel Tunnel high-speed link tracks.'

### *Elizabethan Fayre at Eynsford, June 1914*



*From the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre Couchman Collection. Postcard entitled Elizabethan Fayre, Eynsford, June 27th. 1914 comprising view of scene at Riverside, Eynsford, showing gathering of villagers dressed in period costume, in foreground bystanders and spectators in contemporary dress with backs to camera, in middle ground, left to right, groups comprising men dressed as gentry or nobility, women in bonnets, girls wearing garlands and men dressed as tradesmen or agricultural labourers (all facing camera), in rear middle ground Tudor Cottage, bicycle, outbuilding and motor car, in near distance hedge and trees and in middle distance and far distance fields and woods. 1914 DE402/24/p.19 (L)*

## *This is Mutiny Mr Couchman!*

### *The Story of Lieutenant Samuel Couchman of Rochester*

Cindy O'Halloran...



*Cindy is Senior Archive and Local Studies Assistant at MALSC, responsible for the daily management of the searchroom and non professional staff. She has worked at MALSC for six years following 12 years in branch libraries and as a teaching assistant at a local primary school. Cindy's interests include reading, gardening and anything to do with history, her main passion being the 17th century and the English Civil Wars, her main reason for tracing her family history - to see if her ancestors were on the right side!*

#### *Part One*

Whilst researching various lines of my main ancestral family, I came across the story of a branch that appears in Rochester in the mid eighteenth century. They were connected with the Royal Navy and this association proved rather interesting. This is the story of Samuel Couchman who stole a 5<sup>th</sup> rate Navy Ship, the *Chesterfield*, and paid for it with his life. He was Rochester's very own mutineer.

His Majesty's Ship *Chesterfield* left England in February 1748 with orders to conduct a survey of forts and establishments on the West Coast of Africa. *Chesterfield* was a 5<sup>th</sup> rate ship crewed by 250 sailors and carried 44 guns; the ship also carried a compliment of Marines whose mundane task was to be rudely disrupted.<sup>1</sup>

On October 8<sup>th</sup> 1748, the *Chesterfield* was anchored off Cape Coast Castle, Africa. For several days Captain O'Brien Dudley and his senior officers had been entertained ashore by the local President and his council but all was not well aboard the vessel and in the following hours some of the crew mutinied, taking control of the ship. Lieutenant Samuel Couchman, a junior officer who had been left in charge of the *Chesterfield*, seized the ship in the absence of the senior officers. The episode was to end in disaster for Couchman and his fellow mutineers, and the lieutenant's widowed mother and sisters at home in Eastgate, Rochester, would suffer another loss to their family.

On that fateful evening, Captain Dudley sent the barge back to the ship with a message for the boatswain to send a cutter to collect the officers. They would set sail the following morning. Samuel Couchman had other ideas, however, and had the barge hoisted and called the crew to the main deck. Drawing a cutlass, Couchman declared that they had been ill-used by the Captain and that they would take the ship and run away with her. Some of the men cheered and brandished weapons, but many of the crew were astounded and dismayed by his actions. The boatswain and senior master's mate refused to agree to the mutineers' plan to take the *Chesterfield* which included settling a colony in the East Indies and sinking and destroying other ships which crossed their path. These officers, Gastril and Gilliam, were seized and Couchman asked, "What do you think of this affair?" Gastril replied that what they had done was rank piracy and the end would prove disastrous for them all. Couchman smiled and said he was only going to the West Indies, and the prisoners were then clapped in irons below decks. Some of the crew were appalled by a warrant officer receiving such treatment, and many, carried away in the initial excitement, withdrew their support for the mutiny.

The ship weighed anchor and set sail, the drink casks were broken open and the crew drank to their adventure with gusto. The marines onboard became uneasy about the act of piracy but were directed by their lieutenant to obey Couchman's orders, as he was the superior officer. The mutiny ringleaders, including John Place, carpenter's mate, Thomas Knight, the carpenter, and nine others

who took up residence in the stateroom and plotted their next move, liberally imbibing the captain's best wine and indulging in horseplay. They invited Gastril, the boatswain, and Gilliam, the senior master's mate, to dine with them and tried to persuade them to join the mutineers. They declined the invitation to join with the ringleaders or condone their acts and they told the mutineers they were "on a piratical design". However the plotters had no clear idea of their intentions and the whole mutiny soon became a farce. Some fancied a life of piracy, others to set up their own colony. No clear goal seemed to have been planned in advance.

As the ship was now at sea, Gastril and Gilliam were freed from confinement, which allowed them to re-join the rest of the crew and plot the seizure of the *Chesterfield*. Such was the disorganised state of the whole affair; the gunner's yeoman was able to collect up pistols, which he and the cook loaded. The crew led by Gastril then regained control of the ship, they accosted Place lying in a hammock, they clapped a pistol to his head and "bid him to make no noise, if he loved the smell of powder he should taste it if he did." The other crewmen rounded up the mutineers and placed them in irons below deck. Couchman was allowed to roam freely onboard the ship as he was a commissioned officer, but was later placed in irons lest disaffection break out again. He took this badly and begged not to be placed under arrest. He stated, "If he was confined he would be a dead man". The crewman retorted, "It was better one man died than so many perish". Couchman shed tears and "desired them consider his poor mother and sisters." The boatswain ordered the ship to return to Cape Castle to rejoin the captain, but as he had no navigational skills, on the advice of Gilliam they decided to sail for the West Indies and surrender the ship to the next man-of-war that they met.

On December 2<sup>nd</sup> 1749 the *Chesterfield* arrived in Barbados and was handed over to Admiral Henry Osborn who appointed new officers to take her to England for the courts-martial of the mutineers. The prisoners were split between the *Chesterfield* and *Richmond*, both containing a large number of Marines to keep order. The ships sailed in tight formation with strict orders not to lose sight of each other and keep in contact. Couchman was transferred to the *Richmond*, where the captain, James Sayer, claimed that plans for another mutiny were thwarted. By June 1749 the mutineers were safely under guard in Portsmouth where the courts-martial were to be held on board the *Invincible*. The first trial in June 1749 was that of Captain O'Brien Dudley, who was charged with neglect of duty in allowing his officers to sleep ashore so that the ship was left to the mutineers. He was acquitted by a narrow margin but was never employed again by the Navy.

The whole crew were to be examined by the courts-martial, there being some doubt as to how many other crew members were involved. Vice Admiral Hawke presided over the various trials. Lieutenant Couchman claimed that he had been drunk for many days and that John Place, the carpenter's mate, had led him into the whole affair. He claimed that Place had formerly been a pirate and murderer under Bartholomew Roberts (Black Bart) and he had fomented the idea of stealing the ship. Contrary to reports, he (Couchman) had tried to save the ship and Gilliam had been the instigator of lies about the captain saying he was "a damned dog" and that he would "blow his (Couchman's) brains out" if he did not agree. Gilliam had wanted to take the ship to the West Indies. Although evidence showed that there was no reason for the ship not to return to Africa, the wind and currents being favourable, nobody questioned Gilliam's decisions and his part in the affair was not suspect.

Couchman's defence was to no avail and the courts-martial were of the unanimous opinion that the charge had been fully proved. Samuel Couchman was sentenced to be shot along with Lieutenant Morgan of the Marines. Although Morgan was not an active mutineer, he had done nothing to intervene; he had prevented the Sergeant of Marines arresting Couchman and one crewman claimed to have heard him plotting with Lt. Couchman several days prior to the mutiny. John Place offered no defence and was sentenced to hang. Before his execution, Place wrote to many of the crew,

including Couchman, whom he blamed for leading many others to their death. Couchman merely replied that Place "... would die like the villain he was".<sup>2</sup>

Couchman and Morgan were to be executed on board the *Chesterfield* in July, the rest of the guilty parties to be hanged. Hawke was inclined to leniency for Lt. Morgan whom he felt should receive a lesser penalty and he petitioned the Sea Lords for clemency; Morgan had only recently gone to sea and had a wife and two small children. "He was but little acquainted with the sea service, is extremely weak and ignorant, besides he has a wife and small children whose bread depends solely on him."<sup>3</sup> No reply was forthcoming however and reluctantly Hawke issued instructions for the execution, a matter which his biographer<sup>4</sup> states, "caused him acute distress."

On 14<sup>th</sup> July the lieutenants were transferred from *Invincible* to the *Chesterfield*. A striped flag was raised, the ship's company were assembled and the charges read out. The prisoners were confronted by a file of musketeers who carried out their grim task.

## Notes

1. *Trial of Samuel Couchman*, The National Archives, ADM series.
2. *Mariner's Mirror*, Volume 47 pg 178, Cmdr W May R.N., 1961.
3. *The Hawke Papers 1743 – 1771*, Naval Record Society, 1990.
4. *Admiral Hawke*, Ruddock F Mackay, 1965.

## Background Sources

*The Wooden World*, N.A. M. Rodger, 1986.  
*Clowes Naval History*, Volume 3, 1898.

## Henry Smetham – A Busy Life

Odette Buchanan



*Odette is a retired teacher. She is fascinated by local history and is actively involved in many aspects of the subject. She is a City of Rochester Society visitors guide, a Steward at Restoration House, and a volunteer on the England's Past for Everyone Victoria County History Project. In addition, she is, of course, FOMA Secretary.*

*When researching some facets of Strood History, Odette became intrigued by Henry Smetham; not only did he have a strange name, but he seemed to have written the definitive history of Strood back in the 1890s. Everything published since seemed to rely on his book. Who was this font of knowledge on Strood's past? The following is the first part of a series of three of what she discovered.*

Why did a teenage assistant pawnbroker leave a training position 'with prospects' in Bath (within a few hours reach of his family) to take up a similar position at the other end of the country in Kent?

Henry Smetham was born on 13<sup>th</sup> November, 1854 at North Nibley, Clifton, Bristol, one of six children. The Smethams were a hand weaving family. However, by the time Henry was born, the industrial revolution was well under way and hand weaving was a dying trade. The father, also named Henry, became a Revenue Officer and in this capacity he travelled round the West Country. Some of Henry's siblings were born in Taunton, Petersfield and Havant, which is where they were living in 1861.

The Smethams were spread around Wessex and are a good example of the emergence of a lower middle class in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century: Henry senior's eldest brother, Albert Adolfus became a Workhouse Master, there was an uncle of Henry junior's in Taunton who was an apothecary and another of his uncles, Alfred Henry, stayed in the textile industry. He worked in a cloth factory in Bath and was the founder of the Bath Labour movement. The Smethams were also mainly a very long-lived family, their record being held by an uncle, Alfred Henry, who died aged 115 in 1984. There were other uncles in Illminster, Somerset; and Wootton Glanville, Dorset.

*Henry Smetham circa 1898 from Henry Smetham's History of Strood.*



Henry left school at 12 and was then living in Tiverton, Devon. He was obviously an highly intelligent person; with only a basic School Board education in the 'Three Rs' he went on to become a devotee of Dickens and the author of many books, besides rising through the ranks to become a pawnbroker with three shops. On leaving school, he was apprenticed to outfitter and pawnbroker Arthur Young and lived with the Youngs as a Pawnbroker's Assistant at Bath.

Henry was an excellent example of the Victorian ethics for work and self-improvement. Samuel Smiles' book, *Self Help* was published in 1859 and sold 20,000 copies in the first year. Others promoted the same philosophy of thrift, character and duty. In the next thirty years, over 130,000 copies had

been sold. There were smug lay sermons on the virtues of industry and honesty and these virtues were always connected with the reward of material prosperity. For about twenty years there was a euphoria surrounding the belief of progress, commerce and industry bringing world peace. Henry grew up with this philosophy of material success through hard work and during his life, whenever there was a choice to be made, he plumped for the learned, educational or industrious path.

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What brought Henry Smetham to Strood? The romantic version in his obituary says he came because of his love of Dickens, but one needs an income to pursue one's hobbies and interests. The writer would hazard a guess that his obsession with Dickens played a part, but that he chose the position of Pawnbroker Manager with Mr. Stevens in Strood as an advancement from Assistant Pawnbroker with the Youngs; its being in 'Dickens' Land' was probably an added incentive.

To start with, Henry lived with his burgeoning family over the shop at 99 the High Street, next door to the Workingman's Club. In the 1881 census he is listed with a wife, Maria Kemsley from Bredgar, and two children, Helen Mary aged 2 and Percy Farmiloe aged 11 months. Percy's middle name came from, Henry's maternal line who were a well-known Gloucestershire family. Henry and Maria are both registered as aged 26 on that census, which means that it must have been taken early in the year, as it was his 27<sup>th</sup> birthday in the November. On the census is also listed a Mary Elizabeth Tippet from Bredgar, which raises the question, was Mary Elizabeth a relation or perhaps a friend of Maria's on a visit?

Sadly, Maria died in December 1885 when Percy was only five years old and there were two more little ones to be cared for: Lillian aged two, and a son whose birth caused her death; Maria died just ten days after giving birth. Indeed, more heartache was to come five years later when this same son died. Henry was a pragmatist and must have been very anxious about the well-being of his motherless family. So, he did what was quite common in those days and married Maria's sister, Grace. In the 1891 census, Judith Kemsley is listed as living with them: was his mother-in-law a resident or on a visit? She does not appear in any subsequent censuses but she may well have died by 1901, as by 1891 she was already 78.

Henry's pawnbroking career progressed well. In 1875, before he was 21, he was made manager of the shop. In 1889 he and Mr. Tutt went into partnership and took over the business when Mr. Stevens retired. They expanded into two shops in Strood High Street (numbers 97 and 99) and also took over the old-established business of E.W. Willis at Brompton. Henry's son, Percy did not want to follow in his father's business, so one of the nephews, Hubert Smetham, from Gloucester, was brought to Strood. He lived with his uncle and family and was employed by Henry as Pawnbroker's Assistant. He proved a very able pawnbroker and eventually took over the management of the Brompton shop. At some stage, they also acquired two shops in Rochester High Street, numbers 177 and 179.

Around 1890, the Post Office re-named some roads and re-numbered the shops in the High Street in Strood. Smetham and Tutt's shops changed from 97 and 99 to 20 and 18 respectively. By this time, they had split the operation into two separate businesses. So, number 20 was the clothier's and number 18 the pawnbroker's. With the re-numbering, the Post Office seems to have adopted consecutive numbers, not the customary odds and evens. The Workingmen's Institute and Club was still next door but was called number 17, while number 19 was Steven's the Chemist and barbers. How confusing it must have been for residents, visitors and postmen alike, because by 1897 they are back to numbering them odds and evens, and with Smetham and Tutt back to being numbers 97 and 99.

The firm at Brompton had been renamed and had Albert Smetham listed not only as a pawnbroker but also an outfitters. Outfitters fitted out gentlemen and boys from underwear to top-coats. They would not only

tailor suits and overcoats but also sew shirts. At that time clothes were far more expensive than today and there was always a thriving second-hand trade, not only for suits and shirts, but also underwear and boots. As outfitters, they would also have sold ready-made underwear and accessories like shirt collars and cuffs, ties, socks, suspenders, hats, boots and shoes, etc..

Unfortunately, the First World War caused staffing problems for the business. With the introduction of conscription, there was not enough staff to man all three shops. In the newspapers of 1918 there is a large advertisement announcing the closure of the Brompton branch due to lack of staff; 'all hands have been called up.' It goes on to tell readers that all stock would be transferred to the Rochester and Strood branches. There was not enough staff for a sale but the stock, much of it pre-war, filled five vans and was over £2,000 in value. It then goes on to list all the quality items that would have been useful for presents and household items that 'every housewife will do well to inspect.' The advertisement concludes with the information that 'The commanding corner premises at Old Brompton are now to let.'



*Smetham and Tutt's shops, 97-99 High Street, Strood, from the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre collection.*

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# *The Victoria County History*

Dr Sandra Dunster



*Dr Sandra Dunster was appointed by the University of Greenwich as Kent Team Leader for the Victoria County History's England's Past for Everyone (EPE) in October 2007. With the help of volunteers, she is researching and writing a history of the Medway Towns. She previously taught local and regional history at the University of Kent. Sandra was born and raised in Whitstable and, after 25 years absence, returned to live there in 1999.*

## *Part II*

### **Volunteers Work their Magic**

In the last issue of *The Clock Tower* I talked about some of the research that groups of England's Past for Everyone (EPE) volunteers have been working on and, as promised, in this edition I want to give you a taste of some of the individual projects.

One of the many virtues of the EPE volunteers is their generosity. All contribute much of their spare time and some are very generous with their own research. For example, Catherina Clement is working on a PhD, focusing on the Medway Towns during the Civil War. Although this work is not yet finished, she has handed over much of the data she has collected from the Rochester city records, Chatham parish records and parish registers and has even allowed me to look at some of her drafted written work. (See issues 12 and 13 of *The Clock Tower*) All of this has saved me a great deal of time and has provided a solid basis for my understanding of the political life of the towns in the seventeenth century. In a similar vein, Brian Joyce, whose name will be familiar to many of you from his own publications on the Medway Towns, has put together details of the life of Joshua Cambelton from his research into ethnic minorities. He has also given me sound advice on the development of Luton, a particular interest of his.

Others have offered to follow up areas of specific interest such as the life of an individual, the evolution of a business, or the unfolding of a particular event, and you may already have read Odette Buchanan's article on Henry Smetham. Peter Lyons has traced the rise, decline and fall of the Medway Bathing Establishment, a somewhat short-lived attempt to turn Rochester into a fashionable spa resort in the early nineteenth century. He has also completed a detailed study of the 1807 Rochester election and written an engaging piece about works' outings in nineteenth century Medway.

Astrid and Vic Salmon have each looked at the diaries of two very different Medway residents. Astrid has transcribed the diary of Honoria Roebuck, a Victorian governess from Brompton, detailing her daily activities and concerns. Vic has looked at the events of political life in the early eighteenth century, based around a personal record thought to have been made by a Rochester apothecary. Robert Weller kept a record of the proceedings of council meetings held to discuss the matter of Chatham's desire to hold its own market.

The river is central to the development of the Medway Towns and has not been neglected by volunteers. John Basley has provided much material relating to the Port of Rochester, Jean Stirk is researching the many uses to which hulks were put in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and David Webb has looked at the Dutch invasion of 1667.

Last, but by no means least, there are those who have offered to do some of the donkey work that underpins any research project. Sally Ironmonger and Samantha Wilde, relative latecomers to the project, have provided valuable word processing skills, and Vikki Clayton is about to launch herself into loading some of the material we have collected onto the website.

As you can see, the volunteers are a force to be reckoned with. Their efforts in investigating so many different areas of Medway's history are uncovering details that would otherwise be beyond my reach in the relatively short time that can be spent on this project. In truth, they have gathered far more information than can be crammed into the eight short chapters that will form the EPE paperback on the Medway Towns. I will be forced to select carefully from the wealth of materials they have presented me with. But, rest assured, nothing will be wasted! I hope that over the coming months and years the work they have done will be published for all to read and enjoy either in *The Clock Tower*, on the EPE website, or in other local journals.

## *Editor's Footnotes*



*Amanda Thomas is a freelance writer and public relations consultant. Born in Chatham, but now based in Hertfordshire, she belongs to several historical organisations, including the Kent Family History Society, the North West Kent Family History Society, and The Council for British Archaeology; she has a degree in Italian from the University of Kent and is a member of their alumni association. Amanda was made a full member of the Society of Women Writers and Journalists in 2008.*

I know that everyone who reads this appreciates the importance of heritage because all members of FOMA are interested in history and its impact on the community. Every area around the country struggles with the impact of planning on our heritage and in different ways. In Hertfordshire, for example, where I live, developers and councillors fight a constant battle against building in gardens and the constant threat of giving up precious parts of the Green Belt. In Strood and Rochester the problem is, perhaps, an abundance of heritage and so the loss of another building may often seem unimportant. Coupled with this is the frightening ignorance of some who cannot grasp the importance of our history, having fallen victim to the diminished quality of history teaching in many of our schools.

The potential destruction of the Aveling and Porter building in Strood is a thorny issue. On the one hand it is perhaps not the most beautiful of buildings and the site on which it stands could possibly be utilised in a more cost effective manner. However, once a building has gone it cannot be rebuilt. The edifice represents a period in Strood's history of which we all should be very proud, and as the years pass fewer and fewer of Medway's residents will be aware that Strood was once an important centre for engineering.

I remember when I lived in Strood in the 1960s and my parents lamented the demolition then of many ancient buildings to facilitate the widening of roads or the building of modern flats. There were so many other ancient buildings, one more didn't seem to make a difference. Now the number of these buildings in Strood can be counted on one hand, the Crispin and Crispianus pub being a fortunate survivor of the bulldozer. North Street and Prentice Street have been obliterated, and even my old primary school, St. Mary's on Vicarage Road. Then there is the library on Bryant Road and most heinous of all (for me) Strood Station and the tank defences which were erected during World War Two. As a six year old, those blocks of concrete were stone giants, Strood's Stonehenge in my fertile imagination, but they were a reminder of the war years in Medway. And that is the point, all such features had a story to tell and a reason for being and once they have gone that story and that reason are fast forgotten, which is dangerous, as the lessons of history prevent us from repeating the same mistakes in the future. But perhaps most important of all, old buildings, be they Medieval or Victorian, enrich our environment and provide a continuity with our heritage which should not be broken. I urge you to join Councillor Sue Haydock's campaign, and I repeat her words:

'Make your opposition to the demolition known and support for an alternative use known by emailing the leader of the council, Rodney Chambers at [Rodney.chambers@medway.gov.uk](mailto:Rodney.chambers@medway.gov.uk). In addition contact local industrial archaeologist Jim Preston at [james.m.preston@btinternet.com](mailto:james.m.preston@btinternet.com) or on 07712 618004 so that objectors can form themselves into a body of likeminded people with a will to save the buildings.'

## *May Day in Strood*



*A possible May Day outing from Strood; from the Medway Archives and Local Studies Couchman Collection.*

*Watling Street, Strood Hill or London Road (A2 Trunk Road), Strood. Copy of photograph of group of working men, half standing, half on board horse-drawn charabanc and all facing camera, and most wearing cloth caps and carnations, one man wearing top hat sitting on beer barrel, others wearing bowler and other hats, some smoking cigarettes, three playing mandolins, one playing a flute and wearing ankle length smock and large floral hat, posing in front of London Road elevation of The Old Gun Inn, no. 1 London Road, Strood. Also showing in left distance range of buildings on east side of Cuxton Road and in left middle-ground two women standing in porch of public house, one wearing blouse and neck tie, and on elevation of building sign boards advertising Messrs. Budden and Biggs' noted ales, stout and porter. Possibly a May Day outing or outing for patrons of the public house, a local friendly society, trades union branch, co-operative society or working men's club. c.1910 p.34 (U)*

## *From the Archives...*

### **Some Verses on Stroud fair, by the Rev. Thomas Austen, 1756.**

A FAIR there is just center'd in a Town,  
More fam'd for ruder Fisherman, than Clown,  
Next o an open Marsh the Stalls are plac'd,  
And with one double Row of trifles grac'd.  
Here come from *Roffa's*\* further Street a throng  
Of various Maidens, Beauties old and young,  
Who, having laid aside for one small space  
Their darling knotting, needlework and Lace,  
Like snow that gathers rolling o'er ye ground,  
In smaller parcels other heaps surround.  
Each new Acquaintance from ev'ry quarter meet,  
In gabbling prate much a dish of Chat complete;  
These are in walking so cemented close,  
That face to face they rush, and chin to nose:  
Then laugh aloud and frown, and bless the Fool  
For awkward blindness just derived from School;  
Whose dangling sword blades dignify their skull  
With such grace as ribbons do a Trull.  
Here titt'ring Miss advances in the rear,  
And proudly urges you the way to clear:  
That hence her Hoop may meet no flouting squeeze,  
But safe convey her passing on with ease.  
Here one remarks the garb, the gait, the view  
Of all the male, or airy female crew.  
Some with too many taudries deck their head,  
And scarce inform, if better taught than fed.  
This ogling sly, This bridling up her chin,  
Would fain be deem'd a mortal Seraphin.  
With eyes aslant some mark what others buy,  
Unnotic'd, wou'd your gen'rous temper try.  
This thoughtful Sage steps slow, with glove and cane,  
And moralizes on each Object vain;  
Another wishes for the Evening's close,  
For nappy ale and pipe to toast his nose:  
With oysters fresh, and Company beside,  
Voluptuously to make his minutes glide.  
Here nuts and almonds in whole heaps are spread;  
Here children gaping squall for Gingerbread,  
Here some with copper halfpence try their luck,  
And others urge th' advent'rous chance of *Chuck*.  
Here ribbons, er-rings, grace a Lady's stall;  
There other fancies do the Eyes enthral.  
Here Jews with pencils, seals and gaudy rings,

Convert your money into needless things.  
But would you have the Quintessence of all,  
Then step you to the Oyster-wenches' Stall;  
There crabs and shrimps (both stinking) new you'l buy,  
Your palate teasing till you come to try.  
The Noise thus made alarms each gaping Fool,  
With much Proverbial Cry, but little Wool.

\* Rochester

### *Springtime in Strood*



*From the Medway Archives and Local Studies Couchman Collection. Colour picture postcard depicting romantic and humorous scene of two wayfarers comprising young man in striped suit and bow tie, his straw boater hat lying at rear on bank and young woman in long dress with deeply frilled hem, light, loose lined coat and bonnet, both sitting at side of road, presumed Watling Street, man holding woman in over-ardent and affectionate embrace, woman affecting rejection of his advances. To left of couple is milestone inscribed one mile to Strood and at foot of card is caption It's not the miles you travel but the PACE that kills at Strood. Rural scenery in background. London Series, printed in Germany. c.1905 p.4 (L)*