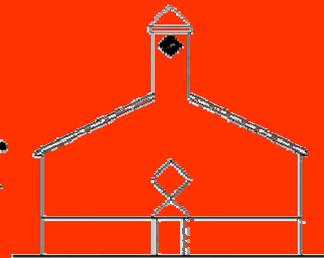


The Clock Tower



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

Issue Number 16: November 2009

Christmas Number

£2.00; free to members



Farewell from Janet Knight!

On 27th November 2009, Archive and Local Studies Assistant Janet Knight, MALSC's longest serving member of staff is retiring. *More inside...*

From left to right: Nikki Pratt, Archive and Local Studies Assistant, Alison Cable, Archivist; Janet Knight, Archive and Local Studies Assistant Norma Crowe, Local Studies Librarian; Doris Herlihy, volunteer helper, April Lambourne, Archive and Local Studies Officer; kneeling, Cindy O'Halloran, Senior Archive and Local Studies Assistant.

From the Chairman

Tessa Towner, Chairman.



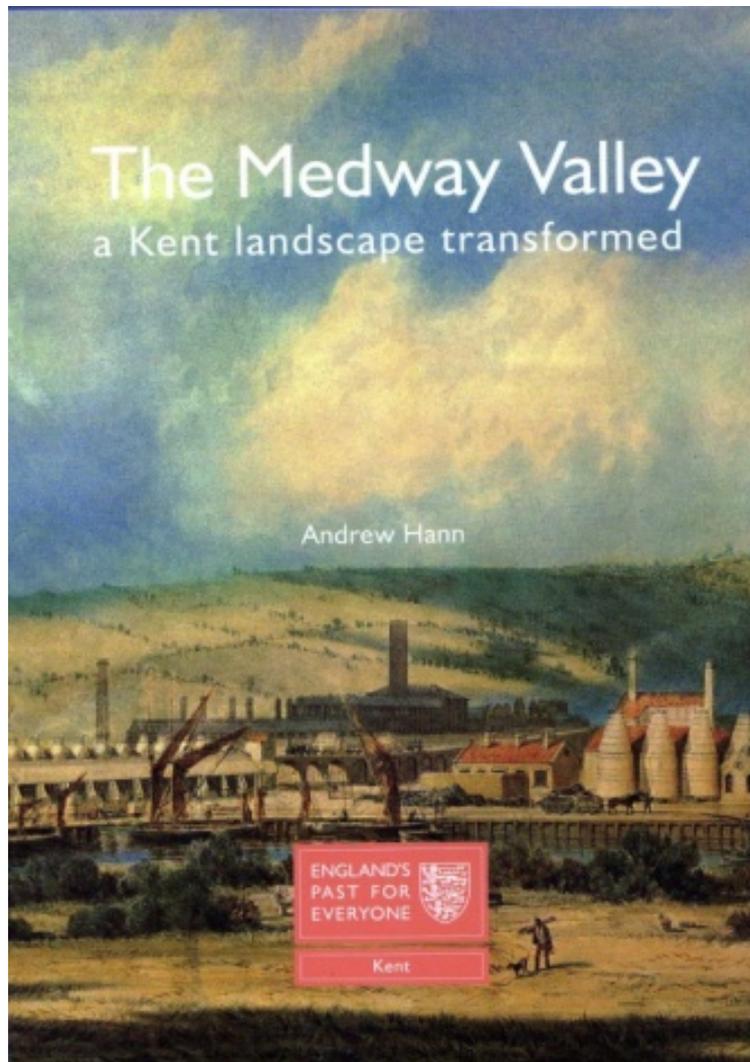
It hardly seems possible that we are almost at the end of yet another year, and by the time you read this I expect your preparations for Christmas will be well under way. It has been an eventful year, starting with all of us full of optimism having been successful with our Heritage Lottery Fund bid, but then came the disappointment of being unable to find a suitable archivist to carry out the work. We are now hopeful that it will be third time lucky and we will be successful in finding a suitable candidate from the next lot of applicants; so far there have been ten and as I write there is still a week to go before the closing date. Hopefully we will be able to make a start on the project in the new year as planned.

I attended the launch of Dr. Andrew Hann's book, *The Medway Valley a Kent Landscape Transformed* (see left), on 22 October with a trip on the River Medway on board the *Kingswear Castle*. Andrew was, as some of you may know, one of FOMA's original committee members. I can highly recommend this book, especially if you have interest in the riverside parishes it concentrates on, which are Frindsbury, Cuxton, Strood, Halling, Snodland, Aylesford, Burham and Wouldham. I discovered new information about Frindsbury, where I was born and still live. The book is a fascinating read for anyone interested in the Medway area and its history.

Our annual Wine and Wisdom quiz night on 16 October was yet another huge success, with a boost to the funds of £245; our thanks must go to our Vice Chairman, Elaine Gardner, for setting the questions. We hope to make this a bi-annual event from next year as it is a successful fundraiser, always oversubscribed and so many seem to enjoy it. May I also remind you that Wednesday 16 December, 10 am to 12 noon, is our annual Open Day at MALSC, so do come along and enjoy seasonal refreshments with the staff. There will also be a book sale. A very happy Christmas to you all and best wishes for the New Year!

FOMA Books for Christmas

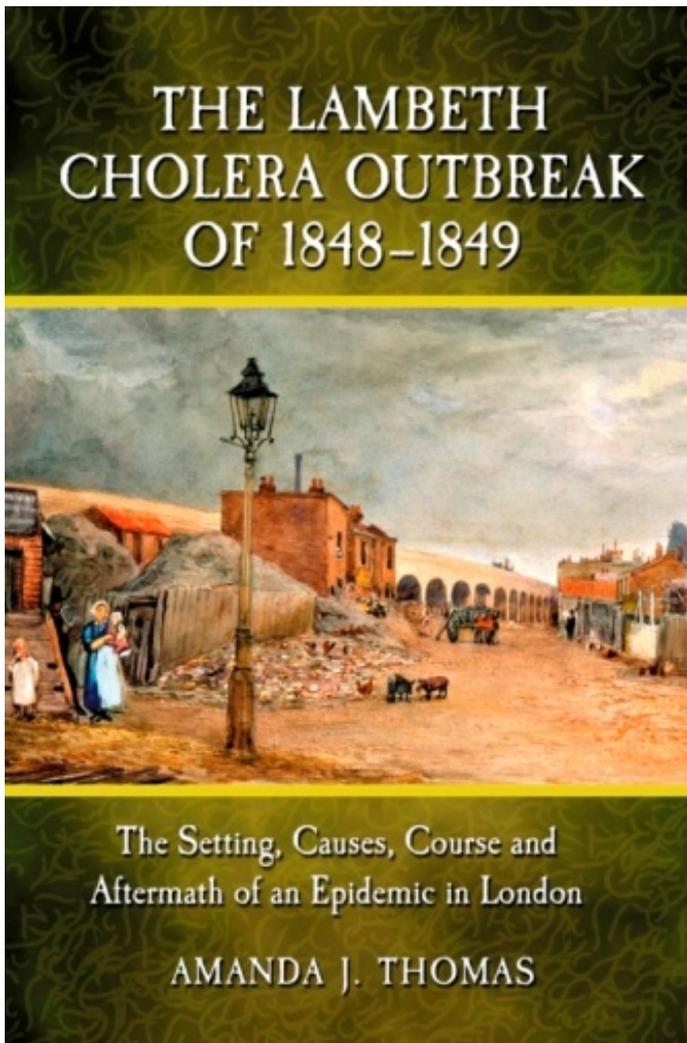
The Medway Valley a Kent landscape transformed



The Medway Valley a Kent landscape transformed, by Dr. Andrew Hann, is published by Phillimore & Co., ISBN 13: 978-1-86077-600-7, price £13.49. Available to buy online at www.phillimore.co.uk.

This book by former FOMA Committee Member Dr. Andrew Hann, is the first of the two England's Past for Everyone volumes for the Medway area and looks at the history of eight parishes on the Medway, exploring the changes brought by the coming of industry to the rural world. The book is wide-ranging and informative, with chapters on farming and industry, landowners and industrialists, housing, communities and religion and the relationship between the Medway Valley and the wider world. Every chapter is highly illustrated with photographs, maps and prints, all of which help to bring the narrative to life. (Dr. Sandra Dunster)

The Lambeth Cholera Outbreak of 1848-1849: The Setting, Causes, Course and Aftermath of an Epidemic in London



The Lambeth Cholera Outbreak of 1848-1849: The Setting, Causes, Course and Aftermath of an Epidemic in London, by Amanda J. Thomas, is published by McFarland & Co. Inc., ISBN 13: 978-0786439898, price £38.50.

Available at Amazon, Waterstone's, Blackwell, Foyle's and all good booksellers; also available as an e-book.

This first major work by *Clock Tower* Editor Amanda Thomas brings together a unique range of sources and illustrations to reveal a forgotten episode in London's history. Situated opposite Westminster on the south bank of the River Thames, by 1848 Lambeth's waterfront had become London's industrial centre and a magnet to migrant workers. The book exposes the suffering of the working population in the face of apathy and ineptitude, and convincingly challenges the long-standing belief that London's numerous cholera outbreaks beginning in 1832 were unrelated. The work combines recent scientific research with first-hand accounts to show for the first time that in the nineteenth century cholera was very probably endemic in the River Thames. *The Lambeth Cholera Outbreak of 1848-1849* includes a day-by-day account of the epidemic, citing individual cases which could help solve many family historians' brick walls. The work also explores the close relationship between Lambeth and Rochester and how this influenced migration in the early years of the industrial revolution.

News and Events

Odette Buchanan, Friends' Secretary



Three months have passed since my last report, the summer's gone and this lovely golden russet autumn is also nearly over. Not only is the year winding down – I think you, the members might be too. I am really disappointed that we have had to cancel events through lack of support or, even worse, when we have cancelled an event, people start phoning to reserve places.

Nevertheless, the Wine and Wisdom quiz night was a screaming success, both from the profit and the social points of view. We catered for ten tables and actually filled 11. Elaine Gardner, our new Vice Chairman, spent a lot of time and trouble composing the questions and she and Tessa Towner also worked hard to produce the excellent *ploughmen* we chomped up. (Some of their boots I personally found a little strong and somewhat tough but the rest was lovely – especially the checked shirts!)

Elaine has made an appeal for ideas below, and after the success of the quiz night, another would certainly be in order, but what do members want? Talks at MALSC? Coach trips? Walks around Medway related to a specific topic? And what about overseas members and those further from the Medway area? We, the committee, are here to promote your wishes. Don't forget our main aim is to create funds to help support the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre with things outside the council remit and beyond their budget.

There does appear to be a tiny glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel regarding the Aveling and Porter building in Strood. SAVE Britain's Heritage (www.savebritainsheritage.org) has joined the fight and we may have gained a stay of execution on the building's demolition. Fingers crossed. One of the main reasons SAVE became involved was because they saw the huge groundswell of support for retaining the building by the enormous number who signed the petition. Thank you to all of you who did.

Some weeks ago I gave a short talk to the Chatham Rotarians on the aims and objectives of FOMA. They were interested and supportive. They are well aware of the many traditions and the historical heritage we have here in Medway and were pleased at how we are trying to support MALSC, especially with the grant from the Heritage lottery Fund to catalogue and conserve the so-called *Archives of Great Expectations*.

This year is the 70th Anniversary of the outbreak of the Second World War and every year now for the next five there will be anniversaries of events which were of especial significance to local people and which are still in living memory. Were you or any of your relations an evacuee? Do you have any photos of being evacuated or any other events from the war? If we could borrow them it would be really helpful. We are also collecting short written memories. I am happy to receive information, as is our Editor, Amanda Thomas, as the next edition of *The Clock Tower* will be a special one on the evacuation of children in the Medway area.

Last of all, let me be among the first to wish you a Happy Christmas and don't let apathy get in the way of your friendship for MALSC!

FOMA Events for 2010

Elaine Gardner, Vice Chairman:



A number of events that were planned for 2009 have been disappointingly supported so, before organising events for 2010, the committee would like feedback and suggestions as to what members would like in future. In addition to socialising we need to keep in mind that part of the FOMA brief in supporting MALSC is to raise funds to enable MALSC to achieve more than might otherwise be the case. The committee look forward to hearing from you. Thank you.

Elaine Gardner, 102 Valley View Rd, Rochester ME1 3NX, Kent.

Email: emgardner@fsmail.net

Janet Knight Retires

On 27th November things at MALSC are going to change, for on that day our longest serving member of staff, Janet Knight, will be signing off and retiring from her post as Library and Archives Assistant. This is a post she has held for over 16 years, and in that time she has witnessed many changes, most notably the arrival of computers and the exponential growth in interest in family history.

Prior to coming to work at MALSC, Janet had a varied career as a bookshop assistant, a Blue Coat, a landlady and a member of staff at U-Drive van rentals. The Studies Centre was a new challenge for her. I first met Janet on the day of my interview for the job of Heritage Officer at the then Rochester upon Medway Studies Centre. I remember her warm smile and her enthusiastic comment, which has stayed with me for over 15 years: "If you come to work here you'll never be bored. There's so much to learn, and it's exhausting, but I *love* it!"

And that sums Janet up really. She is warm, friendly, courteous and committed to customer care. Nothing is too much trouble, and over the years she has quietly and efficiently taken care of so much. In addition to her work in the search room helping customers, she has been strong room assistant, caterer in residence, banking clerk, events' organiser and an invaluable support to the local studies librarians, especially when visiting schools. She has built up a vast knowledge about the history of the Medway Towns, which, fortunately, will not be entirely lost to us, because she has agreed to join our small team of casual assistants, probably covering her own post to start with!

We wish Janet well in the future, and thank her for all she done for Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre. Good on you Girl!

Norma Crowe,
Local Studies Librarian

Fans of Janet's regular column on Edwin Harris will be pleased to hear that this regular feature will continue.

Medway Museums and Library Service

Medway Museums and Library service has held a series of successful exhibitions, usually lasting about ten days, at Eastgate House, Rochester, with the aim of both getting visitors into the house and highlighting the exhibitions put together by MALSC.

However, success depends on volunteers manning Eastgate House when exhibitions are on display, and we are keen to find more volunteers to avoid the stalwart few having to cover two or even three half days.

If you think could offer a two and a half hour morning or afternoon slot at future events please contact Elaine Gardner on 01634 408595 or e-mail emgardner@fsmail.net so that we can add you to the list and contact you before the next exhibition. Thank you!

Request for Material

The Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre would like to expand its biography base to include more variety and diversity. Any information or material on local 'celebrities', past or present, with connections to the Medway area by birth, residence or close links would be much appreciated. This can include families as well as business partnerships. Particularly welcome would be material on Medway's 'ethnic' families or persons and Rainham individuals, which are at present under represented in our collection.

Please contact Catharina Clement at MALSC on 01634 332714

Calendar of Forthcoming Events and Exhibitions

MALSC Events

16th November to 8th December 2009

Not Forgotten: Men from Medway in the Great War.

An exhibition by MALSC.

Exhibitions are free to view.

17th 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.

10th December 2009 to 2nd February 2010

Kent and Pas de Calais: Our Shared History.

An exhibition by the Cross Channel Community Network.

Exhibitions are free to view.

Wednesday 16th December 2009, 10.00 am to 12.00 noon

Open Morning

Come along and meet the staff, enjoy seasonal refreshments, view the exhibitions and book sale!

at 10.45 am Mayor of Medway Cllr. David Royal to announce the official launch of the Medway Image Database – 1000 historical images of Medway

at 2.30 pm, a talk by Chris Bull of Kent Libraries:

Chalk Parish Folklore - What goes Bump in one Kentish Community

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.

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

29 August 2009

Dear Amanda,

I was interested to read H. R. Beckingham's request for info about the Swanley Homes in the latest issue of the newsletter. Thank you for sending him a copy of my article No. 11. I would be pleased to contact him if you felt able to let me have his address etc. Perhaps you let him have mine, please do if that is more appropriate. I think he must be well in his 80s now. I think I've tracked him and his brothers down.

It is amazing that sometimes I get 2 or 3 of these guys a week and I feel I must get their stories before it is too late. I quite understand if you cannot take this any further.

Thanks for keeping me in touch I enjoy reading the newsletters.

With best regards,
Greg Daxter.

Readers will be pleased to hear that the Editor has supplied Greg Daxter with the address of Mr. H.R. Beckingham. See The Clock Tower Issue 11, August 2008 for Greg Daxter's article, The Homes for Little Boys in Hextable, Swanley, Kent.

Obituary



Vincent Keith Rogers 1938-2009

Although not a member of FOMA the news that Vincent Rogers had died suddenly on 7th September 2009 at his home in Strood came as a great shock to those of us that use the Medway Archives on a regular basis. Vince was a member of the Kent Family History Society and the Society of Genealogists and could be found at MALSC every Tuesday and Thursday offering his expertise to members of the public on a variety of subjects, and had in July been elected Chairman of the Medway branch of KFHS. He ran several courses for MALSC over the years in conjunction with other members of KFHS. Vince and I were asked to show the staff in the library service how to use Ancestry, but unfortunately he died before he could do this and we were looking forward to assisting in the set up of a basic family History course to be held next year at MALSC.

He will be greatly missed by all.

Tessa Towner, Chairman.

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

Please note that as of August 2009, the editorial deadline has been changed. The deadline is the **last** Monday (or Tuesday when a Bank Holiday occurs) of January, April, July and October. 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

The copy deadline for Issue 17 of *The Clock Tower* is **Monday 25th January 2010**.

Publication Date

The fourth 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

Copyright

The copyright of the contents of *The Clock Tower* belongs to the Friends of Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre and the authors and owners of any articles and photographs printed. The contents of *The Clock Tower* may not be reproduced without permission of the Editor and/or the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre.

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

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

General enquiries about the Friends can be obtained from the Secretary, Odette Buchanan: 72 Jersey Road, Rochester, ME2 3PE. Telephone: 01634 718231; email: odette_buchanan@yahoo.co.uk

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

The Committee

Patron

The Bishop of Rochester

President

Russell John Race, JP, DL



Vice Presidents

Cllr Sue Haydock (Medway Council Representative), Pat Salter, Brian Kingsley Smith, Bruce Aubry, Professor Sir Robert Worcester KBE DL

Chairman

Tessa Towner: 37 Ravenswood Avenue, ME2 3BY, Kent. picketywitch@blueyonder.co.uk

Vice Chairman

Elaine Gardner: 102 Valley View Rd, Rochester ME1 3NX, Kent.
emgardner@fsmail.net

Treasurer

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

Publicist

Richard Stoneham: rpstoneham@talktalk.net

Members

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

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

The Clock Tower Editor

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

Medway Memories

JL Keys



Seventy years ago on the outbreak of war on 3 September 1939, thousands of children across Britain were evacuated. Here FOMA member John Keys shares some more of his Medway memories with his own story

My Evacuation Story Part One

It was the summer holidays 1939, I was almost 14 years of age and not too young to understand that things were not looking good on the diplomatic front. There had already been one scare in 1938 when our armed services had been mobilised, but Germany's leader, Adolf Hitler, had signed a piece of paper for our own Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, which, we were told, promised 'peace in our time'. However, it was not to be. Germany had already annexed Austria, and occupied part of Czechoslovakia, and was now making threatening moves towards Poland to whom we had promised help if she were attacked. War looked a distinct possibility.

Towards the end of August, my parents were informed that when war seemed imminent, schools in the Gillingham area would be evacuated to 'safe areas'. Parents who did not want their children evacuated needed to inform the school accordingly. Thus it was that on Friday, 1st September 1939, I found myself setting off on what seemed to be a great adventure. Accompanied to Gillingham Railway Station by my mother, I joined most of the rest of my class on the platform after saying goodbye to Mum. Quite seriously, I don't think I had the slightest idea when I would see her again. We all carried our gas masks in their little cardboard boxes, and a small case with a change of clothes, a face flannel and a toothbrush and a packet of sandwiches. We also had a label with name and school details on it pinned to our lapels. It was quite an emotional scene, many parents were in tears, and at best were not looking too happy. Even if they had some idea of the area to which we were headed, they would not know of our actual addresses until we let them know. After 70 years, my memory does not recall if we had been given any indication of our destination.

A rather ancient steam engine arrived, hauling what appeared to be some equally ancient carriages. The Southern Railway had obviously been tested to the limit of its resources. We were ushered on to the train and amazingly found ourselves in what must have been an old Company Directors' coach. It was luxurious. A couple of our teachers looked in on us to check we were comfortable, and to their credit did not evict us from our armchairs. Off we headed into the great unknown.

Sandwich!!! I could not have been more delighted. It was only a few miles from Deal where we had spent many holidays in the 1930s. We were shepherded on to the platform and introduced collectively to some very kind people who all had clipboards and long lists. Each of them was responsible for a certain number of us, and gradually order appeared out of chaos. The Headmaster quieted us down and said we would be told about arrangements for schooling when we were settled in our billets. We were to be attached to Sir Roger Manwood's School, but final arrangements still had to be sorted out. Teachers or prefects would be in touch.

The next step was allocating us to our new families. Obviously the locals had been asked if they were willing to take evacuees, and if so, how many. They would receive a small payment for each child taken in. Each billeting officer had a list of addresses to which we were taken in turn, and

introduced to our new foster parents. Thus a friend and I were introduced to Mr. And Mrs. Knowler, an elderly retired couple who lived in a small terraced house in Upper Strand Street. They both welcomed us and showed us to our bedroom at the front of the house. First impressions were favourable. The house was well furnished and the walls and shelves contained many curios from abroad. The bed was very comfortable and had a washstand with a basin and a jug, a wardrobe and chest of drawers. We were told by our foster parents that they wanted us to live as though we were a family and not be shy. They were both very kind and understanding. Mr. Knowler said that he had joined the Royal Navy in the late part of Queen Victoria's reign and had been discharged on a pension in 1921. He then became a tugboat captain and was later to regale us with many stories of cruises and expeditions. A picture on the wall showed a ship under full sail and with a smoking funnel which he said was his first ship. I have since deduced that it must have been similar to HMS *Gannett*, the Victorian sloop in Chatham Dockyard.

Mrs. Knowler was a gentle lady, a good cook, who knew how to make the best use of rationed food in order to keep two hungry lads fed and satisfied. After settling into our new home, our first job was to complete and post the pre-stamped addressed postcards to our parents informing them of our address.

**In the next issue of *The Clock Tower*, we will be featuring the second part of John Keys' article and more stories on how evacuation changed the lives of children in the Medway area. Please submit your stories and photographs to:
Mrs Amanda Thomas, *The Clock Tower* Editor, 72 Crabtree Lane, Harpenden, Hertfordshire, AL5 5NS or by email to amanda@ajthomas.com.
Please do not send original photographs, however, copies will be returned when requested.**

Edwin Harris – Recollections of Rochester

Janet Knight,
Archive and Local Studies Assistant, 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..."

The Old Stone Pump in Eastgate

A Life of Diversion and Usefulness

I propose to give you an account of the oldest inhabitant of Eastgate. The interview was written many years ago when the police wore very heavy hobnailed boots, quite unlike the silent rubber-soled ones of today. The policeman here described has long ceased to draw his pension. This explanation is necessary as I wish to continue on terms of friendship with the present police force, having been at one time a comrade.

The Old Stone Pump

(Related by the Night Policeman)

Who am I? Well, I'll tell you who I am. I'm Constable X40 of the Rochester City Police, noted for having the smartest appearance and the biggest feet in the Force. I can tell you it's no joke to carry my feet round the extensive beat that I have to cover, placing them down upon the pavement with a sound that resembles the noise of a field battery in action, so that evil -doers may take warning and get out of my way, and thus save me the trouble .

I had a surprise the other night, or rather in the small hours of the morning, after going round my beat and seeing that the inhabitants had not left their street doors open to show their hospitality. The streets were very quiet, for everyone who had passed me was wearing the little red button, "No drinks between meals," and the black listed ones had retired to bed unable to obtain their favourite beverage.

So I walked down the High Street and by way of a rest leaned against the pump, pulled out my little old dudeen and prepared to have a smoke.

I had been there some few minutes, watching the smoke from my pipe as it curled upwards towards the light of the lamp which surrounds the pump, WHEN, suddenly, I heard a deep blood-curdling groan, which seemed to shake the pump to its very foundations.

Very much startled, I look around the pump, but could see nothing except the notice, "1783, taken down, moved and re-erected 1822."

Again, I heard the groan, but this time it was more weird than before. I began to get interested as well as frightened, and could feel cold chills going down my back, while my hair was gradually forcing my helmet off my head. Then a voice, that seemed to come from the interior of the pump, thus addressed me, "Fear, not, policeman, tis merely I, the old stone pump, giving vent to my grief, to think that after standing here all these years I am now of no use except to obstruct the pathway and support the light above my head. If you have nothing more to do for a short time I will give you an account of my life history and some of the things I have seen while standing here.



Policeman in uniform, dated 1890-1910

Image from the Photographic Collection, Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre.

Below: Pump at Eastgate showing light above erected 1822, photo dated c 1902

Image from the Photographic Collection, Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre.



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 final part of a series of three of what she discovered.

Another interest of Henry Smetham's was tariff reform. As a young man from the port of Bristol area, he had been in favour of the prevailing economic advantages of free trade. This was all well and good while Great Britain was leading the world in industrial output, but as the century drew to a close, rivals were busy expanding their empires and overtaking Great Britain with cheaper and/or more efficient products. British trades were being priced out of both the international and home markets. Other European nations, especially France and the newly unified Germany, imposed import duties and embargoes on foreign goods to encourage their home industries. Britain imposed no such tariffs and the home market faced strong competition.

Another deeply held belief of Henry's related to Adam Smith's philosophy, as propounded in his *Wealth of Nations* published in the previous century: Buying in the cheapest and selling in the dearest markets should apply to individual merchants as well as nations. There was a slump in the 1870s which impacted heavily on agriculture and was exacerbated by the lack of embargo on foreign goods. However, there was no will to introduce any tariff reforms because of the awful memories of the 'hungry [18]40s' when many English and Irish agricultural workers had suffered grave deprivations. One of the problems had been the Corn Laws which restricted foreign imports. The reintroduction of duties was seen as likely to lead to a similar situation in the 1870s, but the depressed agricultural industry was seen as a product of the 'natural order.'



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

Both political parties were of the opinion that if one industry, such as agriculture, failed, another would emerge to replace it in an atmosphere of free competition, so there was no need to worry. It was also not seen as a calamity as it did not create mass unemployment and unrest. Agricultural workers, if unemployed, migrated to towns and factories or emigrated to the colonies. So, towards the end of the century, supplying the nation with food was the currency foreign countries used to buy British manufactured goods and free trade. This, together with British shipping superiority, had created a much improved standard of living for rich and poor alike. Why, then, the need for change?

A sizeable minority tried to point out how this policy could not be sustained. The Tariff Reform League was formed and in 1903 the politician Joseph Chamberlain (father of Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain) split from the Liberals and joined the Protectionist wing of the Conservatives causing a rift in that party. He was an excellent orator and stomped up and down the country demanding protection as a unifying force within the Empire. Henry may well have heard him speak and been convinced of his opinion. The League did not remain true to its aims very long but soon became an anti-free trade movement backed by manufacturers who wanted industrial tariffs now that we were losing our supremacy in world markets. The Liberals won the 1906 General Election but the tariff reformers made very little headway before 1914.

This did not deter Henry's enthusiasm for the cause and he spoke forcefully on its advantages whenever he could. In a letter of 1903, Henry's friend, Mr. A. Rhodes, after discussing the meaning of the word 'maiden' in Maiden Lane, Maidstone, went on to comment on Tuff, the local election candidate. He said that Tuff was advocating a return to Protectionism and therefore would have a thorough thrashing at the Polls. He concluded the letter with the news that his wife was very bad and was going to have her wrists punctured again!

More proof of how well Henry spoke on tariff reform is revealed by an inscription on a family heirloom. In his Will he bequeathed to his great nephew, Alfred A. Smetham, a beautiful canteen of cutlery which had been presented to Henry by cutlers Jackson & Ruston of Farringdon Road, London, 'in grateful recognition for his work on Tariff Reform.'

And so to his most important interest – historical research. His major work of 1898, *History of Strood*, has already been mentioned. This had evolved from articles he wrote for the local newspaper in the 1880s and '90s. Long after the book was published Henry continued to explore local history. All through the 1920s and '30s he contributed weekly to the local paper with in-depth, thoroughly researched histories of 32 churches in and around North West Kent. There is plenty of evidence in the articles of what good use he made of his access to the British Museum records and how thoroughly he physically investigated each church. These 'Rambles Around Churches' were eventually published in four volumes. Bear in mind that he was now in his seventies. He also researched and wrote a biography of his friend Charles Roach-Smith. Most of his other published works were prose and poetry pieces.

The *History of Strood* is evidence of Henry's meticulous research: apart from having to rely on translations of Latin texts, every area of his book was taken from primary sources. Much of what he quoted verbatim is useful today because these sources have since been lost or destroyed. In his Will he instructs his trustees to 'submit any letters or other papers left by me which they shall think may possibly be of pecuniary value or historically important to his friends Richard Frederick Brain and Albert Charles Holiday for scrutiny and to pay them a reasonable fee for that scrutiny.' Were there any such letters or papers, and if so, where are they now?

Henry Smetham obviously considered himself an historian because in that same Will (made 4 February, 1945, just two months before he died on 19 April) after the formal introduction of himself

as ‘Henry Smetham, Retired Pawnbroker,’ he requests he ‘be buried in my family grave and for there to be inscribed on the headstone at the expense of my estate – ‘Also the above Henry Smetham [Historian of Strood] ...’

He was a well-known and much respected public figure. In his Obituary, the *Chatham News* described him as ‘The Grand Old Man of Strood.’ He was over 90 when he died and the Obituary continues with, ‘His passing will be mourned by the towns people, old and young, to whom he remained a familiar figure until illness finally laid him low.’ He was always at the forefront of public events: *The Chatham, Rochester & Strood Observer* records his being among the welcoming dignitaries when the Red Cross train arrived with wounded soldiers from the front on Armistice Day, 1918:

‘In spite of his advanced years, Mr. Smetham had enjoyed remarkable good health, and right up to the age of ninety he could be seen almost daily walking briskly along Strood High Street, shopping bag in hand. For having survived his family and women-folk he had in the difficult times of the war to do his own house-keeping.’

This may have been a slight exaggeration, for in his Will he leaves, ‘To Caroline Louisa Swift the water colour picture of Eastgate House Rochester by my daughter Helen Smetham, A.R.C.A., as a small token of my grateful thanks to her for her services in my great need.’

In the following week’s *Chatham News* there was a glowing tribute to Henry from his friend Albert Holiday, one-time Choir Master at St. Nicholas Church, Strood, where Henry was also in the choir. This concluded at the end of two columns:

‘Perhaps there is something especially appropriate that this local patriot passed away on Primrose Day and was interred in Strood Cemetery on St. George’s Day, the national flag flying half-mast from the tower of the old church of St. Nicholas that he loved so well. Peace be to this faithful friend of us all!’

All the local papers were full of eulogies praising his kindness, gentleness, his devotion to public duties and causes, his skill as an orator, biographer, Dickensian, writer, scholar and historian, besides being an acute business man. At the funeral the Archdeacon of Rochester, the Ven. W. M. Browne, read the lesson and the Vicar, the Rev. D.A. Owen, conducted the service at St. Nicholas Church, Strood. Apart from surviving relatives, all the public offices to which he had been connected were represented, including the Deputy Mayor of Rochester, a representative of the Dickens Fellowship Headquarters, the Conservative Club, the Workingmen’s Club and Strood business men and tradesmen. The Pawnbrokers’ Association were unable to attend but sent a floral tribute, as did many others.

So, there we are. Henry Smetham: born at the time of the Crimean War, influenced by the industrial and empirical growth of Great Britain, the emergence of socialism, and two World Wars. His life spanned a time from the cavalry of the Light Brigade to jet aircraft, from ordinary household possessions of a clock and mat to carpets and radios, and from pawnbrokers to hire-purchase. In Strood Smetham saw the passing of the oil cake mills and the Medway oyster beds and witnessed the emergence of Short’s sea planes and his own friend Stephen Aveling’s steam rollers. Did Henry experience the same problems with inventions like the telephone and radio as people today have with computers? Did he continue to write all his works in long-hand or did he learn to use a typewriter? And did he ever learn to drive a car?

Bibliography and Sources:

British Library records
Census records
Chatham, Rochester & Gillingham News
Chatham, Rochester & Strood Observer
City of Rochester Society
Catharina Clement
Friends of Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre
David Hill
HMCS – *Last Will and Testament of Henry Smetham*
Brian Jarrett
Brian Joyce
Kelly's Street Directories
Medway Messenger
National Pawnbrokers' Association
Bernard Smetham
Henry Smetham – *A History of Strood*, etc.
Philip Smetham
Records of Strood Workingmen's Institute and Club.

The writer would like to thank the staff at Medway Archives without whose help, enthusiasm and co-operation this enterprise would not have been possible. She would also like to thank the Secretary of the Strood Workingmen's Club for allowing her access to their records and all her FOMA and City of Rochester Society friends for their helpful suggestions.

Hurstcot: a Child of Nature

Brian Joyce



Brian Joyce is a semi-retired teacher who lives and works in the Medway Towns. He was born in Chatham and has always been fascinated by the history of the area. Brian is the President of the Chatham Historical Society and the author of several books, including The Chatham Scandal, Dumb Show and Noise and Chatham and the Medway Towns, a History and Celebration. With Bruce Aubry, Brian co-wrote In the Thick of It- Medway Men and Women in the Boer War, which was published by their own Pocock Press. Brian is currently working on a similar volume which will examine the experiences of men and women from the Medway Towns during the First World War.

Those MALSC users who, like me, trawl through microfilmed issues of the *Chatham Observer* and the *Chatham News*, cannot have failed to come across articles by *Hurstcot*. These pieces, which appeared from the Edwardian era to the 1930s, were on a wide variety of topics, including history (local, national and international), flora and fauna, horticulture and science. During and after the Great War, *Hurstcot* commented upon international affairs as they unfolded. He was also an avid writer to the letters pages under the nom de plume *Pro Bono Publico*. *Hurstcot* compiled scrapbooks containing his writings, which are to be found on the bookshelves at the far end of the search room at MALSC. I have frequently referred to *Hurstcot's* work, particularly on local history, and have become interested in his life.

Hurstcot was John Atchison Notman, who was born just south of Edinburgh at Carlops, Midlothian, in 1859. His father, David Notman, was a land steward and gardener, who, according to an obituarist of John, forced his son to enter the same living. John, while loving plants and nature generally, detested his occupation, but censuses reveal that he followed it in various parts of the country. In 1881, for example, he was working as a gardener for Sir William Houldsworth at Coodham House in Symington, Ayrshire. The wooded grounds and garden, with their rare trees and plants would have fascinated the young but dissatisfied Notman.



*Copy of photograph of John Atchison Notman alias **hurstcot** of **hurstcot**, Wigmore, gardener, comprising full length portrait of subject facing camera, wearing hat, long bushy beard and working clothes. Couchman's accompanying notes provide brief biographical details of subject who died in 1937 aged either 78 or 79. 3" x 2" (76mm x 53mm) Original exposed before 1937 DE402/25/p.45 (U) From the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre Couchman Collection.*

At the time of the 1891 census he was living in Castle Eden near Easington, County Durham. The nearby Castle Eden Dene, a densely wooded area, occupies a steep sided ravine and is relatively inaccessible. Today it is a national nature reserve. No doubt in the early 1890s, John Notman enjoyed its tranquillity and marvelled at its rich flora and fauna. Later in that census year, Notman married his wife Jane in Kensington and remained for the rest of his life in the south of England. His daughter Edith was born in Southwark and his son Edgar at Clewer near Windsor.

During the 1890s, much of Britain's farming became uneconomic, and some landowners sold their holdings to Land Companies, who divided the land into plots which they sold on to speculative builders or individuals who craved to live a simple, rural life. Some time in the mid 1890s, John and Jane Notman and their growing family moved to Kent, purchasing a plot of woodland on the former Hempstead Estate near Rainham.

Notman built a small cottage on this plot – perhaps based on the *bothy* he was living in in Ayrshire at the time of the 1891 census. He named his new home Hurstcot, meaning 'house in the woods,' in which his last three children were born. His children were named Edith, Edgar, Edna, Edmee, Eduna and Edreda, and I would welcome readers' comments as to this combination of forenames.¹ Notman continued to make a living from landscape gardening, at the Royal Naval Barracks at Gillingham, for example. He also designed and helped create the gardens at Gillingham Park and the Luton Waterworks.

In 1905, Jane Notman died. It was then, according to Henry Smetham², that other local sage, that John Notman began to evolve into *Hurstcot*. No doubt he had always sought to educate himself, particularly in matters of nature and horticulture. After the death of his wife, the Scot surrounded himself with books, reading and absorbing everything he could on a huge variety of subjects. It was now that he began to deluge the local press with articles on history, science, natural history and virtually every other subject under the sun. *Hurstcot* roamed the countryside surrounding the Medway Towns, studying its plants and wildlife. William Coles Finch, the Resident Engineer for the Chatham and District Water Company and an amateur naturalist himself, knew Hurstcot well. He wrote that the Scot was always dressed in the same well-worn clothes, with no coat or umbrella, even in the wettest of weather.

Another friend, H.T. Sanders of Gillingham, wrote that Hurstcot was 'a child of nature,' living in his precious cottage in the woods at Hempstead long after his children had grown up and left. After his friend had died, Sanders wrote:

In his small hut on his own woodland he was happy and content with the birds and flowers for company. He scorned the soft amenities of our modern days and sustained a strong active and healthy life on the simplest fare, allowing himself no luxuries.

A fine, handsome presence, ill-clad and most carelessly attired, almost forbidding in his demeanour – such was the exterior view. Underneath beat a heart of gold.

He was a scholar of repute and entirely self-taught. His pocket companions were his Greek testament and his magnifying glass. He was familiar with Latin and Greek and had a fair knowledge of Hebrew.

To enjoy a country walk with him was a sheer delight. The wayside flowers and hedges had a voice which he understood, and the very path we trod became eloquent with mineral and geological lore. Old buildings and churches revealed, under his guidance, secrets and intimacies of a long time past. Without preparation he could open the scriptures and give an instructive and inspiring address from the storehouses of his mind.

These storehouses enabled Hurstcot to make regular contributions to the local newspapers well into his old age.

Hurstcot continued to live in his cottage in the woods at Hempstead, surrounded by his huge library and the natural world which he loved until his death in 1937 at the age of seventy-eight. His son Edgar, who was by then a Presbyterian minister in Wales, conducted the funeral service. Hurstcot lies in Gillingham Cemetery surrounded by his beloved trees and birdsong.



Photograph of John Atchison Notman alias hurstcot of hurstcot, Wigmore, gardener, standing on path in country churchyard, looking at camera, resting left hand on headstone and holding walking stick in right hand, showing in foreground grassy area, in middle ground path and subject, in near distance grassy area and headstones and in distance house and wooden fence. Before 1937. 3 1/4" x 2 1/4" (83mm x 55mm) DE402/25/p.45 (L) From the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre Couchman Collection.

Notes

1. If you have any suggestions on the reason for the combination of Notman children's forenames, please contact the Editor, Mrs Amanda Thomas, 72 Crabtree Lane, Harpenden, Hertfordshire, AL5 5NS or by email to amanda@ajthomas.com. Any comments will be passed on to Brian Joyce.
2. See Odette Buchanan's articles on Henry Smetham featured in this issue of *The Clock Tower* and Issues 14 and 15.

Acknowledgments and Sources

Chatham News; Chatham Observer; Census Enumerators' Returns and Arcadia For All; The Legacy of a Makeshift Landscape by Dennis Hardy and Colin Ward.

The Victoria County History

Dr Sandra Dunster

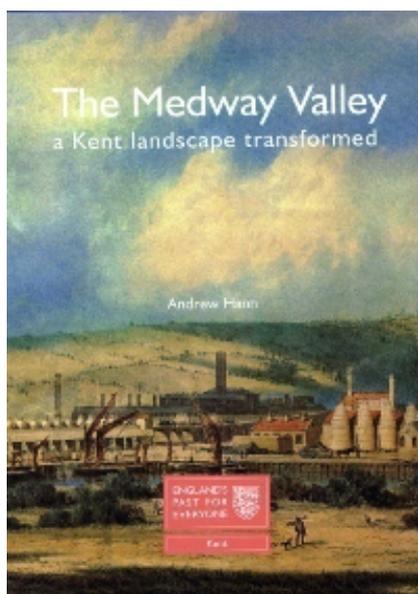


Dr Sandra Dunster was appointed by the University of Greenwich as Kent Team Leader for the Victoria County History's England's Past for Everyone (EPE) in October 2007. With the help of volunteers, she is researching and writing a history of the Medway Towns. She previously taught local and regional history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

Medway Valley Book Launched

Andrew Hann's book, *The Medway Valley: a Kent landscape transformed* was launched in fitting style on 22 October. This is the first of the two England's Past for Everyone volumes for the Medway area and looks at the history of eight parishes on the Medway, exploring the changes brought by the coming of industry to the rural world. The book, published by Phillimore is wide-ranging and informative, with chapters on farming and industry, landowners and industrialists, housing, communities and religion and the relationship between the Medway Valley and the wider world. Every chapter is highly illustrated with photographs, maps and prints, all of which help to bring the narrative to life.

The launch was held on board the *Kingswear Castle* paddle steamer and expectant guests boarded at the close of a calm and sunny day. At 6.00pm, with over 60 people on board, we set off along the Medway and Bob Ratcliffe gave an impromptu performance as tour guide, pointing out items of interest to port and starboard. As the sun dipped below the horizon, eager local historians bought copies of the new book from Baggins Book Bazaar who had set up their stall on deck. Andrew was immediately surrounded by a gaggle of admirers seeking a signature for their new purchase.



Half an hour into the journey Professor John Beckett, director of the Victoria County History called the crowd to order and Andrew took the opportunity to thank everyone who had contributed to the project. Foremost amongst those who received praise for their dedicated support of the project were the volunteers, who put so much hard work and effort into the project. Without them the final book would have contained less new material and less detail and the work would have been far less enjoyable.

Professor Joanne Finkelstein, Head of the School of Humanities at the University of Greenwich echoed this praise for the volunteers and congratulated Andrew on his achievement. She also thanked all those organisations and societies in the county who had made a financial contribution to the project. Prof. Beckett then drew the formal proceedings to a close by presenting a copy of the book to each of the organisations who had supported the EPE initiative.

From this point on guests were free to enjoy the generous supply of food and drink that had been provided for our enjoyment and to chat to friends old and new. It was great opportunity to reunite those who had been involved in the project and to hear their memories of working with Andrew. At 8.00pm the boat returned to the quayside and Andrew wished his guests farewell at the end of a very enjoyable evening.

From the Archives...

The Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre's website, CityArk, <http://cityark.medway.gov.uk/>, contains a wealth of information, including a wealth of fascinating illustrations and photographs in its Imagebase. To follow - in true Dickensian style - is a seasonal snippet. Taken from MALSC's Couchman Collection contained in a typescript copy of a statement by Thomas Stephen Aveling of Restoration House, Crow Lane, Rochester, describing his solving of the mystery of the ghost of Restoration House in 1876, recorded some time later, with a comment by W. Glanvill Mason on the history of the house, recorded after 1893. These were compiled during the early twentieth century and typed by Couchman c.1980. pp.44-45; Refs., DE402/9/44 and DE402/9/45.

The Ghost of Restoration House

(as described by Mr. Thomas Aveling in his own words.)

'Every stranger looking at the house exclaims, "That house must have a history and a ghost." Many a story has been told of the ghost which has, from time to time, been seen (or is said to have been seen) within its walls, and many a servant has, from fear, refused service in this so-called haunted house.

An image of the first page of Couchman's typed text

THE GHOST OF RESTORATION HOUSE.

(as described by Mr. Thomas Stephen Aveling, in his own words.)

"Every stranger looking at the house exclaims, 'That house must have a history and a ghost.' Many a story has been told of the ghost which has, from time to time, been seen (or is said to have been seen) within its walls, and many a servant has, from fear, refused service in this so-called haunted house.

I came into possession of this old mansion in December, 1875, and on April 27, 1876, slept in it for the first time. At ten o'clock on that night my family retired to rest; having some letters to write, I sat up later. At a quarter to twelve I was startled by a loud noise - a sort of rumbling sound which appeared to proceed from the hall. I left my writing and went to the hall and found that the noise proceeded from the staircase, but I could see nothing unusual. . . Fortunately, or unfortunately, however, I had no belief in ghosts, . . . I thought someone had fallen on the stairs, and I shouted first softly and then very loud - too loud almost for a human voice. . . I approached the chest from which appeared to come the word 'Hush!' . . . I was just strong enough to move the chest. . . Again the noise and again the 'hush!' which now appeared to come from the floor. . . I then felt I would rather have had someone with me. . . I went for a candle. . . On my return I was saluted with 'Hush!' which I felt convinced, came from a voice immediately under the floor. . . By the light of the candle I discovered what appeared to be a trapdoor, . . . By the aid of a long screwdriver I was able to move the door. I raised the lid and looked into a dark chasm; all was still. At that moment a tall old clock (a grandfather clock) suddenly with a loud whirr struck the hour of twelve. A long African spear was in the corner near me, and I struck this into the opening. I then tied a string to the candlestick to lower it into the opening; but I was for the first time nervous, or I may say frightened, at what I saw.

"I must go back to the morning of the day when the extraordinary noises were heard in the old house. On that morning I went through the house examining the pipes and taps of water and gas supply; one old water-tap (main tap) I turned on, but neglected to turn off again. About a quarter of a mile from the house is a brewery which formerly supplied the house with water.

I came into possession of this old mansion in December, 1875, and on April 27, 1876, slept in it for the first time. At ten o'clock on that night my family retired to rest; having some letters to write, I sat up later. At a quarter to twelve I was startled by a loud noise – a sort of rumbling sound which appeared to proceed from the hall. I left my writing and went to the hall and found that the noise proceeded from the staircase, but I could see nothing unusual ... Fortunately, or unfortunately, however, I had no belief in ghosts...I thought someone had fallen on the stairs, and I shouted first softly and then very loud – too loud almost for a human voice...I approached the chest from which appeared to come the word "Hush!"...I was just strong enough to move the chest...Again the noise and again the "hush!" which now appeared to come from the floor...I then felt I would rather have had someone with me...I went for a candle...On my return I was saluted with "Hush!" which I felt convinced came from a voice immediately under the floor...By the light of the candle I discovered what appeared to be a trapdoor...By the aid of a long screwdriver I was able to move the door. I raised the lid and looked into a dark chasm; all was still. At that moment a tall old clock (a grandfather clock) suddenly with a loud whirr struck the hour of twelve. A long African spear was in the corner near me, and I struck this into the opening. I then tied a string to the candlestick to lower it into the opening; but I was for the first time nervous, or I may say frightened at what I saw.

"Under the staircase was a large tank, and this was filled each night when the pumping in the brewery took place. This tank and the brewery supply had ceased to be used, but the tank remained full of water, and the pipes communicating with it full of air. At a quarter to twelve on the night in question the brewery pump was set to work and my turning on the connecting tap having put the brewery and house in communication, the

moment the pump began to work the air in the pipes was driven from the brewery end into the tank, and being forced into the water bubbled to the surface, causing a most extraordinary rumbling, rolling sort of noise. Every now and then the water and air escaped to the surface, making a sound which resembled 'hush'.

"There were no carpets on the stairs and the house was not completely furnished - this assisted the noise and reverberation. What did I see when I looked in the chasm which alarmed me? A man's face - which must have been a reflection of my own, the candle brilliantly lighting it up and producing a 'Pepper's ghost.' "

T.S.A.

=====

"A well-known writer of the present day, (1893), in describing his visit to Rochester, says: 'Here is Restoration House, Antique peace rests on that ivy-grown front, on those quaint windows and chimneys. You enter in, and staircases and passages and wainscotted chambers carry you centuries away.'"

I quite agree!.

W. Glanvill Mason, F.R.M.S., etc.,
"Bernvale", Maidstone Road,
Chatham.

The second sheet of Couchman's typed text

I must go back to the morning of the day when the extraordinary noises were heard in the old house. On that morning I went through the house examining the pipes and taps of water and gas supply; one old water tap (main tap) I turned on, but neglected to turn off again. About a quarter of a mile from the house is a brewery which formerly supplied the house with water.

Under the staircase is a large tank, and this was filled each night when the pumping in the brewery took place. This tank and the brewery supply had ceased to be used, but the tank remained full of water, and the pipes connecting with it full of air. At a quarter to twelve on the night in question the brewery pump was set to work and my turning on the connecting tap having put the brewery and house in communication, the moment the pump began to work the air in the pipes was driven from the brewery end into the tank, and being forced into the water bubbled to the surface, causing a

most extraordinary rumbling, rolling sort of noise. Every now and then the water and air escaped to the surface, making a sound which resembled “hush.”

There were no carpets on the stairs and the house was not completely furnished – this assisted the noise and reverberation. What did I see when I looked in the chasm which alarmed me? A man’s face – which must have been a reflection of my own, the candle brilliantly lighting it up and producing a ‘Pepper’s ghost.’

T.S.A.

A well-known writer of the present day, (1893), in describing his visit to Rochester, says, “Here is Restoration House, Antique peace rests on that ivy-grown front, on those quaint windows and chimneys. You enter in, and staircases and passages and wainscoted chambers carry you centuries away.’

I quite agree!

W. Glanville Mason, F.R.M.S., etc.,
‘Bernvale,’ Maidstone Road,
Chatham.

Below: Crow Lane (Maidstone Road), Rochester, c. 1890.

Copy of photograph entitled Restoration House, Rochester looking east across Crow Lane from The Vines, showing iron railings, lamp post, bushes, entrance way and bollards, lawns and pathway in middle and foregrounds. 8” x 5 7/8” (203mm x 148mm) c.1890 p.38; Ref. DE402/9/38.

From the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre Couchman Collection





Restoration House today, taken by The Editor on the evening of the FOMA visit in June 2009.

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.

Charles Dickens is often associated with Christmas. His 1843 ghost story, *A Christmas Carol*, celebrates the Victorian (and our own) image of Christmas where giving and the coming together of family are everything. *A Christmas Carol* is often shown on the television at Christmas in one of its many versions: from *Black Adder* to the Muppets. However other Dickens' works are also enjoyed at this time of year, and there is nothing better than immersing oneself in a Dickens' plot and forgetting all that Christmas cooking and washing up. As one of our favourite and most prolific authors, I wonder how Dickens would have felt about modern technology? Just as Odette Buchanan ponders in her final article on Henry Smetham how someone born at the time of the Crimean War must have felt to have seen an aeroplane or motor car, how would Dickens have felt about downloadable e-books?

I had no idea this new technology had become so popular until I received an email from my publisher informing me that my forthcoming work was also to become an e-book. My initial reaction was whether this was the same as a director being told their film was 'going straight to DVD.' Thankfully I swiftly realised that on the contrary, e-books are the way forward in publishing and are becoming increasingly popular, especially in the academic world. I had always been hostile to the thought of people reading something on a screen rather than holding a text with proper pages to turn, and despite everything which now follows still maintain there is no substitute. However, when I saw Amazon's Kindle I realised this clever piece of technology would revolutionise the way we read. Not only does it look and feel like a book, but it weighs less and has the capacity to hold up to 1,500 texts. I imagined taking a Kindle away with me, the amount of space it would take up in my handbag, and how it would revolutionise holiday reading. Sony too has brought out a similar product, and whilst both cost over £150, I know what I am hoping Santa will bring me this Christmas!



Happy Christmas and warm wishes for the New Year from everyone at the Friends of Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre!



Betty's Postcards



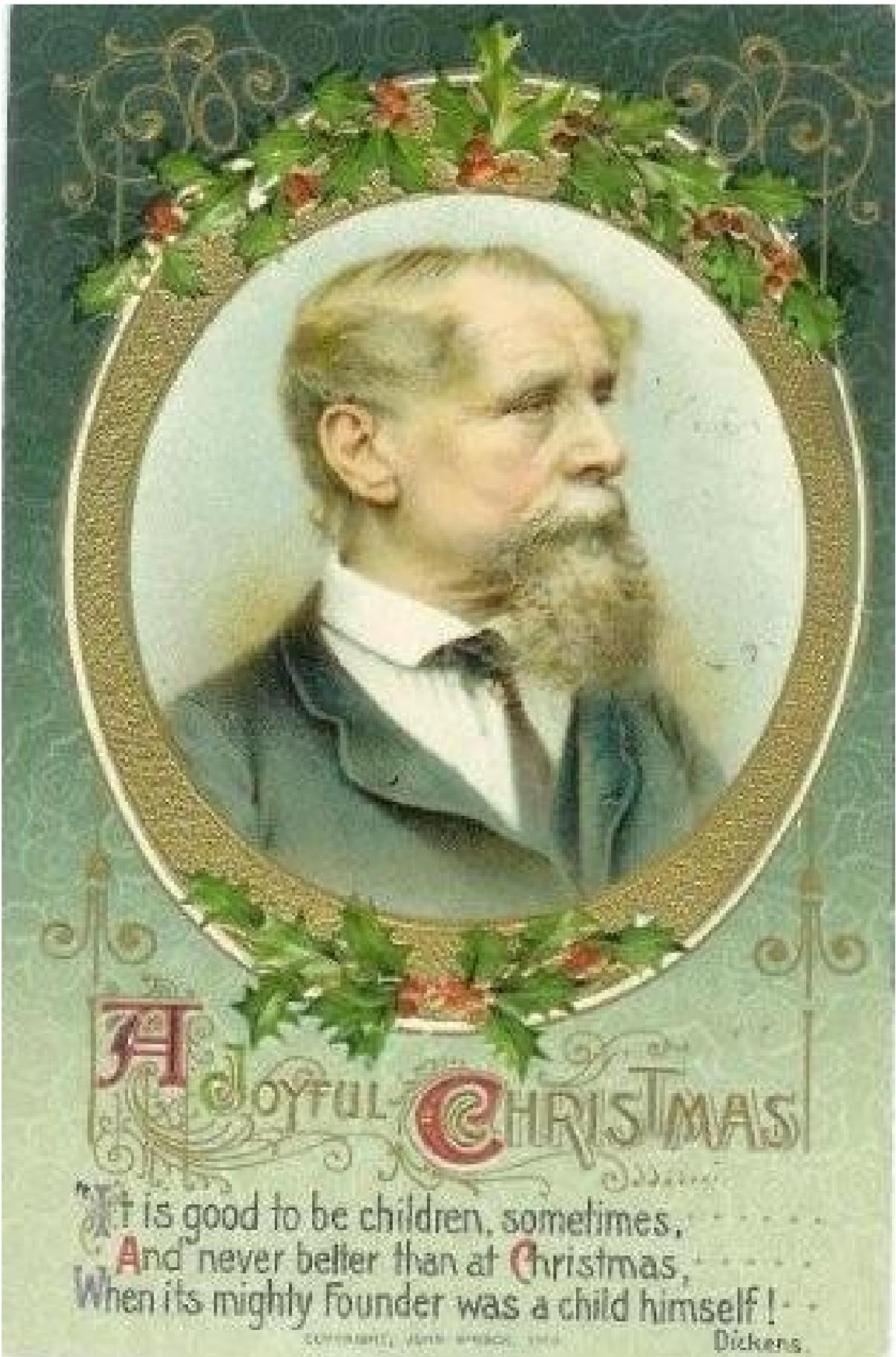
FOMA Membership Secretary, Betty Cole, has collected postcards with a literary theme for about 25 years, and to date she has hundreds in her collection, including at least 50 on a Dickens theme.

This addition to my collection is a recent purchase from America. I paid \$12.95 for it which is more than I would normally pay for my postcards. In the flesh it is more beautiful than appears in print. The holly leaves and the main greeting are embossed and the portrait surround is in gold. The card travelled on a one cent postage stamp from "DR" in Erie, Pennsylvania to a Mr. and Mrs. J. E. Catlin, 425 8th Ave, Roanoke, Virginia. It is postmarked 23 December 1910 and there is no message other than the printed one. Charles Dickens was as popular in America as in England. He had toured there twice in his lifetime, giving lectures and readings of his works. I have read that during the second tour visiting Washington, (a few years before his death in 1870), President Andrew Johnson and his ministers attended the readings every day for a week.

The sending of Dickens' related postcards within America forty years after his death is testimony to the lasting popularity of his work. I have researched the name *John Wunsch* which appears at the bottom of the card. He was a publisher and, possibly, designer of postcards in America. I don't know if John Wunsch painted the portrait or if it was copied from an earlier painting, and if anyone can tell me I would be grateful for the information.

Suggestions should be sent to The Clock Tower Editor, Mrs Amanda Thomas, 72 Crabtree Lane, Harpenden, Hertfordshire, AL5 5NS or by email to amanda@ajthomas.com. Any information will be passed on to Betty Cole.





A JOYFUL CHRISTMAS

It is good to be children, sometimes,
And never better than at Christmas,
When its mighty Founder was a child himself!

Dickens.

LONDON: JOHN WILKINSON, 1874