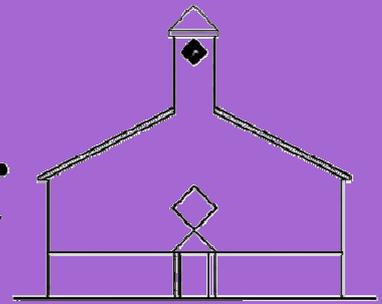


# The Clock Tower



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

Issue Number 20: November 2010  
*Christmas Number*  
£2.00; free to members



## *Heritage Open Days The Bridge Chapel at Rochester*

Betty Cole, FOMA Membership Secretary, (right) and Councillor Mrs. Sue Haydock, FOMA Vice President, on duty at the Bridge Chapel during the Heritage Weekend. Further information inside in *News and Events*, including Sue Haydock's account of one of the celebrations to mark the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Bodleian Library.

**BUMPER CHRISTMAS ISSUE! Also inside: Part Two of the Battle of Britain Special, including memories of wartime Broomhill, Strood.**

## *A FOMA Talk: Medway, Lambeth and Cholera*

Elaine Gardner, FOMA Vice Chairman



On Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> September FOMA held the second of their planned talks for members and visitors at Frindsbury Parish Hall. The speaker was Amanda Thomas, FOMA committee member and Editor of *The Clock Tower*; her title was *Medway, Lambeth and Cholera*.



*Amanda addresses the audience*

Whilst researching her family tree Amanda had been curious about the sudden disappearance of a number of her ancestors in the Lambeth area during the late 1840s. A visit to the Lambeth Archives led to her discovery of the appalling living conditions in Lambeth at the time and the rarely talked about cholera outbreak of 1848-9 which resulted in nearly 70,000 deaths in England. Amanda's surprise at this, combined with her journalistic background, resulted in her detailed research into the cholera epidemic and its causes, culminating in the publication of her book *The Lambeth Cholera Outbreak of 1848-1849*. These formed the basis of her well illustrated talk.

Amanda left the audience both fascinated and appalled at the gruesome living conditions close to the Lambeth waterfront with its raw sewage, overcrowding and resident pigs in numerous cellars and yards, not to mention the industrial pollutants from the rapidly expanding variety of trades and industries that had sprung up in this area of London during the 1830s and 40s! This was particularly interesting to me as a number of my ancestors were living in the Southwark area adjacent to Lambeth during this period – perhaps this is why I can't find some of them.



*An audience enthralled and appalled!*

Illustrations of the cholera bacillus and descriptions of how the victims suffered and died were not for the faint-hearted, but equally interesting were Amanda's explanations of how and why families from this area had migrated to Lambeth in the first place and how the cholera arrived - and probably became endemic - in the area. She also went on to explain how the outbreak spread to Kent and the Medway Towns, and a condensed version can be found in this issue of *The Clock Tower* in *Editor's Footnotes*.

A thoroughly enjoyable, if slightly macabre, evening was had by the good sized audience that attended. Thank you Amanda.

The next talk will be held on Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> November at 7.30 pm:  
*The First World War* by Christopher Barker:

**Please note, booking for FOMA talks is no longer necessary!**

**All events in 2010 and until further notice are at Frindsbury Parish Hall**

**Talks are £2 for members, £4 non-members.**

**Booking for Quiz Nights and enquiries through the FOMA Secretary:**

**Odette Buchanan, 72 Jersey Rd, Strood, ME2 3PE; [odette\\_buchanan@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:odette_buchanan@yahoo.co.uk); 01634 718231.**

## *From the Chairman*

Tessa Towner, Chairman.



Welcome to our 20<sup>th</sup> edition of *The Clock Tower*. It doesn't seem possible that it was only just over four years ago the suggestion was made by Stephen Dixon (the former MALSC archivist) that we form a Friends organisation. It all started because MALSC needed to raise the funds to purchase the Robert Sands letter (see the images on the FOMA website, [www.foma-lsc.org/index.html](http://www.foma-lsc.org/index.html)) which was bought at auction in the year the nation celebrated the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Nelson's famous victory at Trafalgar. Since then, as you know, the Friends has continued to purchase items for MALSC and these are now known as the FOMA Collection, which have been catalogued and are listed on our website.

Our meeting at Frindsbury in September was well attended to hear Amanda Thomas (our *Clock Tower* Editor) tell us about her journey of discovery about the cholera outbreak in Lambeth and the Medway area which led to the publication of her book (*The Lambeth Cholera Outbreak of 1848-1849*). This was a fascinating talk, illustrated with pictures of the area at the time, and also an insight into how people were living at that period in the slums of Lambeth. It was truly horrific! Amanda included in her talk additional material she had researched on the cholera outbreak in Medway and she has reproduced this in her *Editor's Footnotes* for those who were unable to attend the talk; a review is also included in this issue.

Once again the FOMA Quiz Night was well supported by almost 60 people and a great night was had by all. Many thanks once again to Elaine Gardner for producing the questions, and with the added help of Rob Flood who kindly put together a musical round of familiar signature tunes from various TV programmes. This caused some considerable brain searching and amusement! Thank you also to all those who brought raffle prizes: the evening provided a £230 boost to our funds.

The cataloguing of the City of Rochester Archives, made possible by the grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund, is progressing well. Many of you will have received emails about volunteering for the next stage of the project for the Archives of Great Expectations at MALSC on Wednesday mornings working with Valerie Rouland, our project archivist, and the existing team of volunteers. Please contact the MALSC Archivist, Alison Cable, at [alison.cable@medway.gov.uk](mailto:alison.cable@medway.gov.uk) for dates and times. The next FOMA meeting will be taking place at Frindsbury Parish Hall on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2010 with a talk on the World War One *Tommy* by Christopher Barker.

This edition proclaims the end of yet another year so may I take this opportunity to wish you all a very Happy Christmas and a Prosperous New Year!

*We are delighted to report that Tessa has recently been appointed Secretary to the Kent Family History Society.*

## *News and Events*

Odette Buchanan, Friends' Secretary



We've arrived at the windy, gold and russet season and it won't be long till Christmas.

We have had a very successful quarter since the last *Clock Tower* was published. First we commemorated the Battle of Britain with a successful exhibition at MALSC, entitled *The Medway Towns and the Battle of Britain*. A Local Slant on *Britain's Finest Hour*. This has now transferred to Eastgate House for a couple of weeks. I did the research but the excellent presentation was down to Tessa Towner and her laminating skills.

As you will have seen, Amanda Thomas, our *Clock Tower* Editor, gave us a very interesting and scary talk about the cholera outbreak in Lambeth in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Her horrific details of the progress of the disease from outbreak to death in three or four days – and sometimes within just hours - brought home the awful suffering the people of Haiti must now be going through.

And then there was the quiz – a great time was had by all, thanks to Elaine Gardner and Tessa for the questions and presentation. The addition of Robert Flood's musical round was an interesting departure. If he is willing, it could become a regular feature of what we hope will be a six-monthly event. Of course, we also need to remember that a major part of the success of the quiz nights is the tasty ploughman's dished out in the interval – again thanks to Elaine and Tessa but also Betty Cole who managed to juggle her catering help with taking the money at the door. And talking of money, we managed to make a very comfortable net profit of £230.

Before the end of the year, we have Chris Barker's talk on the First World War to look forward to on the 23<sup>rd</sup> November. Please do come along.

At last we have started sorting and helping HLF Archivist Valerie Rouland with the Rochester City Corporation records [see Alison Cable's report below]. They looked very boring when we first set eyes on them, but what a wealth of interesting and often hilarious things they contained. For example, there was one file about an inch thick devoted solely to suggestions for a new name for the area when amalgamation was suggested in the late 1940s. Many had come from people overseas – past residents and the armed forces - whose home was one of the Medway Towns. The massive response seems to have been engendered by a news item asking for suggestions in the *Daily Express*. Sounds familiar? In addition to reading the files we were also trained on how to identify which files needed some care before being re-labelled and put away.

In signing off, let me be one of the first to wish you a Happy Christmas and Peaceful New Year.

*Don't miss Odette Buchanan's article in this issue on Broomhill and the Battle of Britain in Part Two of The Clock Tower special feature.*

## MALSC OPENING HOURS

Please note the following revised opening hours at the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre.

As of 1 April 2010, MALSC will no longer be open until 6pm on a Tuesday, and will close at 5pm. The following opening hours therefore now apply:

Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday 9.00 am to 5.00 pm; Saturday 9.00 am to 4.00 pm. Wednesday and Sunday closed.

## *Calendar of Forthcoming Events and Exhibitions*

### FOMA Events

Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> November, 7.30 pm

A talk by Christopher Barker:  
The First World War

Tues 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2011, 7.30 pm

A proposed talk on the 'Archive of Great Expectation' Project

**Please note, booking for FOMA talks is no longer necessary!**

**All events in 2010 and until further notice are at Frindsbury Parish Hall**

**Talks are £2 for members £4 non-members.**

**Booking for Quiz Nights and enquiries through the FOMA Secretary:**

**Odette Buchanan, 72 Jersey Rd, Strood, ME2 3PE; odette\_buchanan@yahoo.co.uk; 01634 718231.**

## Calling all Photographers!

At the end of May 2010, Roger Smoothy and Roy Moore gave a talk to FOMA on the collection of glass plate negatives which have been digitalised and placed on line. They can be viewed at [www.kentphotoarchive.org.uk](http://www.kentphotoarchive.org.uk) and selecting the 'Medway Images'. They are hoping that enthusiastic photographers will go out and take digital images of the same views today. The idea is to try and take the image from the same place as previously, by printing a copy of the original and taking it with you. FOMA Vice Chairman, Elaine Gardner, has agreed to co-ordinate this for Roger and Roy in order to avoid duplication of effort with everyone taking the same photos!

If you are interested, take a look at the website then e-mail me at [emgardner@fsmail.net](mailto:emgardner@fsmail.net) (or phone 01634 408595) telling me what you plan to photograph and I will give you precise details of what is required.

## MALSC Events

### Exhibitions

7<sup>th</sup> October to 30<sup>th</sup> November

Roll out the Red Carpet: Royal Visits to Medway

2<sup>nd</sup> December 2010 to 11 January 2011

Dickensian Medway

13<sup>th</sup> January 2011 to 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2011

Sir Joseph Williamson – The Man behind the Name

24<sup>th</sup> February 2011 to 12<sup>th</sup> April 2011

Winget's: At Work and Play

### Talks and Events

17<sup>th</sup> November, 2.30 pm.

Royal Visits to Medway

Bob Ratcliffe

8<sup>th</sup> December; doors open 9.30 am for 10.15 am start.

Dickens: 150th Anniversary of Great Expectations

The Launch of Percy Fitzgerald's Collection.

**Please note: this event will be taking place at Eastgate House, Rochester.**

**See the following page for further details.**

**Unless otherwise indicated, all the above are held at the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre, (MALSC) Civic Centre, Strood, Rochester, Kent ME2 4AU. Unless otherwise indicated, talks and events are £5, or £4 for FOMA members. Further information is available from MALSC; please telephone 01634 332714 to book.**

**Please note: You may be aware that Medway Council has been 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.**

### Exhibitions at Eastgate House

3<sup>rd</sup> November to 14<sup>th</sup> November, 10 am – 2 pm

Battle of Britain.

**Dickens' Diorama of Delights**  
**Eastgate House, High Street Rochester,**  
**8 December 2010**

**PROGRAMME**

The doors of Eastgate House will be open between 9:30 am and 16:00 pm

**Morning**                      **Launch of the Percy Fitzgerald Collection**

10:15 – 10:25                  Guests to assemble in the Reception Room  
10:30                              Arrival of The Mayor and Mayoress Elect, Cllr. David Brake and Mrs Carmita Brake  
10:35 – 11:30                  Launch of the Collection

**Afternoon**                      **Celebrate with us! Dickens' Diorama of Delights**  
(**ticket holders only**; the ticket entitles the holder to attend all three events)

14:00 – 14:30                  **The School Room**  
*Dickens at the Guildhall Museum* by Dr. J. Clarke, Education Officer, Guildhall Museum, Rochester

14:00 – 14:30                  **The Garden Room**  
*The Dickens Library: Percy Fitzgerald, the Dickens Fan* by Prof. M. Andrews, The Editor of *The Dickensian*

14:45 – 15:15                  **The School Room**  
*Dickens at the Guildhall Museum* by Dr. J. Clarke, Education Officer, Guildhall Museum, Rochester

14:45 – 15:15                  **The Garden Room**  
*The Dickens Library: Percy Fitzgerald, the Dickens Fan* by Prof. M. Andrews, The Editor of *The Dickensian*

15:30 – 16:30                  **The Reception Room**  
*Celebrate with Us! Victorian Christmas* – a play performed by Eastgate House Players

Tickets can be purchased from the Box Office, at the Brook Theatre, The Central Theatre, Visitors Information Centre and online (see below). Half of the proceeds of the sale will be donated towards the Dickens' Chalet Restoration Fund.

Tickets £8; FOMA members £6.

Box Office: 01634 338338  
email: [boxoffice@medway.gov.uk](mailto:boxoffice@medway.gov.uk)  
[www.whatsonmedway.co.uk](http://www.whatsonmedway.co.uk)

## 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 (see above), 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](mailto: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**

## *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](mailto:amanda@ajthomas.com). FOMA Secretary, Odette Buchanan, often receives queries from members or visitors to the FOMA website, [www.foma-lsc.org/index.html](http://www.foma-lsc.org/index.html). If you have any additional information for the following correspondents, please contact the Editor.*

**From:** William Houston  
**To:** [odette\\_buchanan@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:odette_buchanan@yahoo.co.uk)  
**Sent:** Sat, 28 August, 2010  
**Subject:** Photo archives

Can you tell me if an archive of photographs for Gillingham exists?  
As a former resident of Gillingham I am particularly interested in photographs taken of victory street parties taken after VE day in 1945.  
Thank you for any help you can provide, regards,

William (Bill) Houston in Canada

**From:** Odette Buchanan [[odette\\_buchanan@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:odette_buchanan@yahoo.co.uk)]  
**Sent:** 28 August 2010  
**To:** William Houston  
**Subject:** Re: Photo archives

Hullo Bill - Yes, I'm sure there are photos of Gillingham VE Day parties. I've forwarded your request to our local archives. There are a lot of local photos that can be viewed on the web. The archivist will give you the correct link.  
Good luck  
Odette

**From:** Denise McCann  
**To:** [odette\\_buchanan@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:odette_buchanan@yahoo.co.uk)  
**Sent:** Thu, 21 October, 2010  
**Subject:** Waddup

Hi,  
I came across your website whilst searching for information on Aaron Wadup/Waddup. I have an Aaron Waddup in my family tree with 4 children who were born in the 1750's/60's, with a wife Mary, living in Chatham, Kent.  
I can see from your FOMA collection that you have a will for Aaron Waddup, and would like to know if this is the same person as in my tree.  
Any information you could give me would be gratefully received.  
Kind Regards,

Denise McCann.

Denise - hi -

Thank you for your enquiry. I have forwarded it to our members who are also members of Kent Family History and specialize in such requests.

Hopefully, they may be able to help you.

Good luck in your search,

Odette.

Denise,

Your email has been passed to me regarding the Waddup shown on the FOMA website. The item in question was not a will but a lease on some property that was held in Strood, below is a summary from the Archives of what it contains

DE1210/T20

1. Henry Frederick of Strood, wheelwright
2. Aaron Waddup of Rochester, taylor and draper

Assignment of lease of two tenements lately built at Newarke, next to the High St (to the south), marshland (to the north) and Angell tenement. [Originally leased to Mr Frederick in 1776 by the Dean and Chapter of Rochester on a forty year term]

As security for a loan of £150 plus interest

With accompanying bond of obligation (1 July 1777)

Date: 1 July 1777

NB Assignment is badly damaged and some text is illegible

2 docs *FRAGILE*

There is a will which you can download for £3.50 on the National Archives website which is probably him

[http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documentsonline/details-result.asp?Edoc\\_Id=222263&queryType=1&resultcount=1](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documentsonline/details-result.asp?Edoc_Id=222263&queryType=1&resultcount=1)

The parish registers for the Medway area are to be found on the following website they are the images digitised from the original registers <http://cityark.medway.gov.uk>

Look for parish registers online on the left hand menu and follow instructions.

Hope this information is helpful,

Regards,

Tessa Towner.

Chair F.O.M.A .

Chair Kent F.H.S. Medway branch

**Readers will recall that we were contacted by a non-member seeking information on VIOLET ETHEL THOMAS, born circa 1896. In 1913 Violet gave birth in Faversham and then immediately afterwards returned to her work in service at 32 North Street, Strood. Any information to the Editor, as above, please.**

## Rosher Family Correction

The Editor was recently contacted by Michael E. Sweeney, Jr., a descendant of the Rosher family of Gravesend; Mr. Sweeney is the great great grandson of Percy White Rosher. Mr Sweeney noticed an error in the article *The Rosher Family: From Gravesend to Hollywood* in Issue 09, February 2008. In this the author, *Clock Tower* Editor Amanda Thomas incorrectly stated that Percy White Rosher and Mary Ellen Catherine Burns married in 1891. This should have read 1881 and we apologise for this mistake which was a typing error.

### *A Reminder of News from Snodland Millennium Museum*

FOMA member and curator of the Snodland Millennium Museum, Dr Andrew Ashbee, has advised us of an addition to their collection. Dr. Andrew Hann has deposited 19 box-files of material from the Victoria County History's England's Past for Everyone project collected for his book *The Medway Valley: A Kent Landscape Transformed*. A sample is also held at MASLC. The catalogue can be found at [www.snodlandhistory.org.uk](http://www.snodlandhistory.org.uk) under *catalogues*. The museum is open on Wednesdays and Sundays from 2.00 to 5.00 p.m. further information is available from Andrew Ashbee at [aa0060962@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:aa0060962@blueyonder.co.uk) .

Dr Andrew Hann's book is also now available on Amazon, or at Phillimore and Co, publishers, at [www.phillimore.co.uk](http://www.phillimore.co.uk) .

## *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, 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](mailto:amanda@ajthomas.com).

The copy deadline for Issue 21 of *The Clock Tower* is **Monday 31<sup>st</sup> January 2011**.

### Online 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](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

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)

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](mailto: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](mailto:bettycole@blueyonder.co.uk)

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Rochester, ME1 2AA, Kent.

### The Clock Tower Editor and Publicist

Amanda Thomas: 72 Crabtree Lane, Harpenden, AL5 5NS, Hertfordshire.  
[amanda@ajthomas.com](mailto:amanda@ajthomas.com)

**Obituary**  
**Michael Edward de Caville**  
**1946 – 2010**



It is with regret that we announce the death of FOMA member Michael de Caville, who sadly lost his battle with cancer on 7 August 2010.

Michael had spent some 25 years researching the stories of the men of the Medway Towns who died in WWI, and the results of his research can be found in a collection of folders he placed in the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre.

He served in the army with the Middlesex Regiment in Northern Ireland, as well as other places around the world. On leaving the army he worked for the GPO until he was diagnosed with cancer about three years ago.

He gave a talk at the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre last November talking about the men he had found in the course of his research and an exhibition was also put up at that time demonstrating some of the local people who made the ultimate sacrifice in WWI.

Some time back we promised Michael that we would put together an index and CD covering his research on these men in his memory to be produced in time for the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the outbreak of WWI in 2014. We are now planning the format for this in conjunction with the Medway branch of Kent FHS, and will require volunteers to assist in this. . There is still a lot of work to be done in achieving this goal, so if you would be interested in getting involved then please contact FOMA Chairman Tessa Towner who is coordinating the project.

**Alec Whitfield**

In September we were informed of the death of FOMA member Alec Whitfield. Our condolences to his family and friends.

## *Heritage Open Days*

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

*News from FOMA's Medway Council Representative on the Heritage Open Days and the Bodleian Library.*



The Heritage Weekend took place around the country from 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> September 2010, and Betty Cole and I volunteered to man the Bridge Chapel in Rochester for Friday 10th September. Betty and I were just two of the many volunteers who helped out in various historic buildings over the weekend.

The Bridge Chapel is a medieval chantry built by Sir John de Cobham, and dates from the end of the 14th century. It stands at what was the east end of Rochester's medieval bridge, built to replace the Roman bridge. The chapel provided a place for travellers and pilgrims to pray for a safe journey. Three priests earning a salary of £6 a year said masses for the souls of the Cobham family until the chapel was suppressed during the Reformation in 1548. Over the next three hundred years the chapel was used variously as storage, a private dwelling house, a public house and a sweet shop. In 1879, during construction of the Bridge Chamber the chapel was a ruined shell.

In 1937 the Bridge Wardens and Assistants restored the Bridge Chapel. Today it is used primarily for dinners and meetings, but once a year on 2<sup>nd</sup> November, All Souls Day, a service is held to commemorate the founders and benefactors of Rochester Bridge. Displayed on the north and south walls of the chapel today are paintings and engravings showing the various bridges that have spanned the Medway at Rochester. [*For similar images see The Clock Tower, Issue 19, August 2010; Edwin Harris – Recollections of Rochester*]. On the east wall are various Coats of Arms. The chairs and council table were made by Robert 'Mouseman' Thompson of Kilburn Yorkshire in 1937.

The Bridge Wardens manage the Bridge Trust which provides and maintains crossings over the Medway; funding is provided by historic endowments and investments. The Rochester Bridge Trust has not charged a bridge toll since the mid-sixteenth century and today operates its bridges according to its ancient motto - *publica privatis* – from the private for the public.

*With thanks to Rochester Bridge Trust Wardens; [www.rbt.org.uk/chapel/index.htm](http://www.rbt.org.uk/chapel/index.htm)*



*From the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre Couchman Collection. Photograph of print entitled Bridge House at Rochester looking south along Rochester Bridge approach (formerly West Gate, subsequently Esplanade), showing group of buildings on left side, Medway Valley in the distance, riverbank in right foreground and bridge foot in right middle distance. Engraved and published by Richard Godfrey, 120 Long Acre, London 1 October 1770. For original see below. 6" x 4 1/2" (150mm x 115mm) p.1*

For further information on Heritage Open Days, visit [www.heritageopendays.org.uk](http://www.heritageopendays.org.uk)

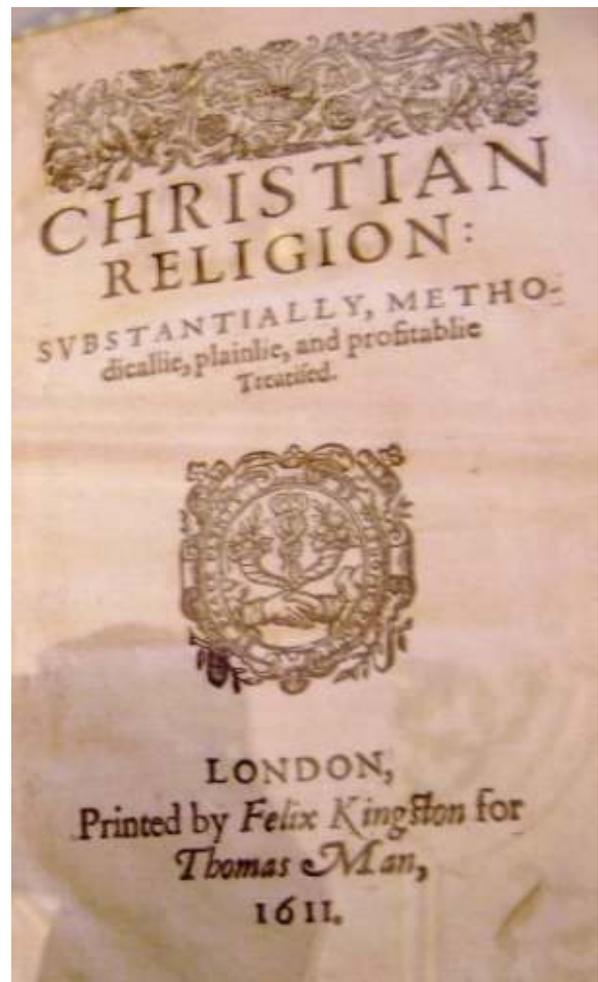
In this issue of *The Clock Tower*, Alison Thomas looks at the history of The Crown Inn on the Rochester end of the bridge in *Edwin Harris – Recollections of Rochester*.

## The 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Bodleian Library

In spring 2010, the Worshipful Company of Stationers and Newspaper Makers held an Archive Evening with music and verse celebrating the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the agreement between the Stationers' Company and the Bodleian Library. I was lucky enough to be invited along and had a wonderful time viewing the variety of documents on display. They included Thomas James' personal copy of the 1610 agreement, the first book sent from the Stationers' Company, various sonnets written by Shakespeare, indentures, orders of Parliament, and prints. The music was provided by Peter Ward Jones playing the harpsichord, songs were sung by Katy Cooper and verses and readings were by Sam Dastor. Along with the finger buffet in such august surroundings it was a memorable event.

The photographs are not of the best quality, taken without flash, but they give a taste of what was on display.

*The first book sent from the Stationers' Company: A religious treatise published by Thomas Man.*



*A description of Parthenia from the exhibition: "As far as it is known, the 1610 agreement didn't exclude printed music but, in practice, it didn't start coming in in significant quantities until the 1780s. It is quite possible that Parthenia (c.1615) was deposited under the agreement as it appears in the 1620 catalogue. The book is a collection of keyboard music by Byrd, Gibbons and Bull. Its importance lies in the fact that it constitutes the first English music to be engraved on copper plates." Arch.Ac.11.*

# *Quaker Education and Schooling 1775-1840*

Catharina Clement



*In 2005, Catharina completed a BA in history at Canterbury Christchurch University, and then began a part-time PhD in local history entitled Reactions in the Medway Towns 1640-1660. She has been involved in various local history groups and projects such as FOMA, CDHS, and the Victoria County History EPE projects. She won the 2009 Friends Historical Society Award resulting in a paper on Medway Quakerism 1655-1918 delivered at the Institute for Historical Research and later this year at the Friends Library in London. Currently Catharina works for MALSC.*

## Part Two

### William Rickman's Quaker School 1786-1813

On 9<sup>th</sup> November 1785 Thomas Marsh of Chatham, ship owner, wrote to Robert Fowler following William Alexander's death: 'It is the Widow's Request that the School may be kept forward...if a suitable Master can be obtained to support it with Reputation.' In his memoirs Rickman stated he was approached in person by William Cowper, surgeon, of Rochester whilst teaching for a few weeks at Clerkenwell School 'to inquire if I would be willing to undertake the charge of a boarding-school at Rochester'. William Rickman's letter to a Friend in America in June 1786 confirms that he was going 'for a while on trial, without coming to any agreement as to Terms, time or otherwise...' From his own account it is apparent his apprenticeship in America had been as a merchant and although he briefly taught in a school there no evidence is available that he had any formal training as a teacher.<sup>1</sup>

*William Rickman; reproduced with permission of the Religious Society of Friends in Britain*



Marsh reported in 1785 that the school was thriving with 26 boarders, but that was not what Rickman found the following year. 'I found the boarders, did not return; only one was there, who had remained during the vacation; there were a large number of day-scholars, fishermen's sons etc, very unruly; also several girls...these were nearly or quite as disorderly as the boys...' The school had temporarily been run by the usher or apprentice teacher, probably George Blaxland, who left in 1789 for Hitchin and became a schoolmaster, later marrying Alexander's daughter Sarah. It would appear that without a qualified teacher many of the parents had withdrawn their children from the school. Rickman wrote, 'a relative of mine, in Sussex, Samuel Rickman, had, before the vacation, two sons at the school' and as a result of his writing to the parents the two boys returned to the school; they were probably David and Nathaniel. In 1788 Rickman married Alexander's daughter Elizabeth and had two daughters, who feature later in the account.<sup>2</sup>

William Rickman's school rapidly became successful despite its difficult beginnings. By the late 1780s he closed the girls school as it required too much of his time. Around the 1790s numbers had increased so much that he needed to build a new wing with two schoolrooms and a playroom. Amongst the pupils were several renowned figures both local and national. Joseph Jackson Lister attended the school for a year, aged 12, in 1798. Lister followed in his father's footsteps becoming a wine merchant, but is also noted for his works on optics and microscopy. His mother's pocket book entries for 1798 indicate that Rickman twice went to their home to accompany Lister back to school after the vacation. A letter survives addressed to his mother from Rochester dated 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1798:

'Dear Mother,

Expecting thou wilt be pleased to hear from me I may now inform thee that I arrived here safe. As the price of drawing is now advanced from 15s to a Guinea p. Qr (per quarter) occasion'd by the small Number of Boys employ'd therein...

Thy dutiful Son  
Joseph Jn Lister



*Joseph Jackson Lister; reproduced with permission of the Religious Society of Friends in Britain*



except that Rich<sup>d</sup> Cough continues rather trou-  
blesome. With kind respects to Sel's wife  
I remain thy Aff<sup>o</sup>  
W Richman

John Lister  
Mess<sup>rs</sup> Lothbury

Dear Joseph

London 14<sup>th</sup> of 2<sup>nd</sup> Mo. 1792.

8

Being some days since returned from my  
Journey to Ackworth, thought it would be agreeable to send thee a  
few Lines, and first that I acquiesce in paying the additional Sum on  
acct<sup>t</sup> of the slowness of the Scholar who now learn drawing, but am with  
thy dear Mother desirous that thy attention to this entertaining part of  
thy education may not prevent thy improvement in the more useful  
branches thereof. and having been told by an acquaintance of your  
Teacher that thou art in want of Clark's Latin Grammar we have made  
general search for it but cannot find it. if such a Book therefore be  
wanting must request thy Master to procure it, as expect it will afford  
him some little profit to supply it, and still be no dearer to me.

him some little profit to supply it, and some of the

Except from the closeness of the weather, and the burthen of a  
great Coat in travelling I had an agreeable Journey, much pleas'd  
with the order of the School, the Situation and Conveniences, which  
attend Ackworth beyond many places; but think it must be bleak  
Very cold, <sup>in Winter</sup> thou resides in a South land, and <sup>has</sup> many privileges  
beyond the bulk of poor Lads there, mayst thou be careful to prize  
them, and manifest thy grateful sense of greater favors by a pru-  
dent sober & orderly deportment, indeed I have a hope this will  
be thy endeavor, that so thou may be in the way of an eye being  
open'd in thee to things that are more excellent. I had the satisfac-  
tion of meeting our valued Fr. <sup>th</sup> Solomon Chapman & Wife at

Buxton making something of a circuitous Journey on my return.

Thou may remember how I had to mention on taking leave  
his hope that thou might be favoured with a visitation of divine love  
and by obedience shalt experience a satisfaction beyond anything that  
this World can afford. This is the earnest desire also of thy dear Mother  
and myself for thee, as every thing here is changeable, and our acceptance  
with our great Creator the only foundation for true happiness both here  
and hereafter. Our Fr<sup>d</sup> I had was something better than when in Lond<sup>o</sup>  
but purpose staying 3 or 4 weeks at Buxton for his health. He enquires  
very kindly after thee. Thy dear Mother and Sister join me in  
entirest Affection who remain

Thy Affectionate Father

John Lister

One of these boys was Richard Low Beck of Dover and nephew of Joseph Lister. Richard was sent there in 1797 aged five and attended till 1804. William Beck, the family biographer, questioned Rickman's educational qualifications and felt that Richard's seven years 'were not in this instance productive of much educational advancement, for too little effort was given to awakening an interest in learning, and much school time was wasted in concealed play ...' He served his apprenticeship as a druggist and later went to work as a wine merchant for his uncle. Two pupils with connections closer to home were George Alexander and Frederic Wheeler. George Alexander was the grandson of the previous owner William Alexander and attended the school from the age of four to fourteen. On completion of his education he worked in his father's business and became a bill broker. His links with Rochester were never severed completely as he inherited part of his grandfather's property in the 1840s. George was heavily involved in the Quaker anti-slavery campaign. He had this in common with Frederic Wheeler. Wheeler was the son of a local grocer in Strood and a day pupil at the school under Rickman. When he left school he served as an apprentice to his father and later took over the business becoming involved in many social movements to combat injustice.<sup>4</sup>

Differing accounts emerge about Rickman's discipline. George Alexander had recollections of Rickman using the birch to instil discipline. Frederic Wheeler recounted in 1887 how when teaching in America Rickman had 'effected, as occasion required, a tingling on the backs of his young clients there.' However I 'do not remember that I ever had the advantage of his corporal discipline, or I might have turned out better, that is, not quite so bad.' Whilst Rickman was the proprietor there appear to have been two ushers or apprenticed teachers. John Griffiths joined Rickman's school as an apprentice in about 1790 and completed this in 1797. At some point in 1794 the young Griffiths fell in with bad company, that is, John and William Friend, but was considered redeemable. His successor, Robert Styles, first acted as a servant to the household and was later promoted to usher.<sup>5</sup>



*Frederic Wheeler, reproduced with permission of the Religious Society of Friends in Britain*



*George W. Alexander; reproduced with permission of the Religious Society of Friends in Britain*

The school taught the traditional subjects mentioned in Alexander's prospectus as well as Latin. In 1788 Rickman was short-staffed and requested his friend Samuel Eaton to advertise the fact to other Friends. 'I am in want of an assistant in my school at Rochester...a young man qualify'd to teach the Latin language...' It would appear from the letter that James Phillips wanted his son, a pupil at Rickman's school of the same name, instructed in Latin. French and drawing were two further extras that were not part of the standard curriculum as Lister's quarterly account for 1798 confirms. From Beck's account sport had yet to be incorporated into the timetable: 'the absence of organised games out of doors left the lads [so] restless.' Great emphasis was placed on mathematics and neat handwriting. With kind permission of the Society of Friends Library a sample of John Clayton's penmanship at Boley Hill School, Rochester, is reproduced below. This curriculum was geared to turn out youngsters that were literate and suited to a life in trade or industry as the careers of the former pupils testifies to. In 1786 Rickman presumably charged 15 guineas per annum as Alexander had, but found that he could not manage on these terms and so 'gradually rose his [my] terms.' By 1798 he was charging Joseph Jackson Lister £20 per annum for board and education. A typical quarterly account for school fees can be gleaned from the illustration below.<sup>6</sup>

Boarding School  
Boley Hill  
Rochester

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Honour thy Parents

---

Learning and good Education are  
better than riches

---

Mark the perfect man, and behold the up-  
rights, for the end of that man is peace.

---

John Clayton foreriset.

15 of 5 Mo. 1787 aged 13 Years

As Brinton has observed Quaker schools operated in a family environment and were an integrated community. Rickman's was no exception. Richard Low Beck viewed his schoolmaster in affectionate terms referring to him as 'Billy' and considered the school a 'Friendly [an] Establishment'. Thomas Scattergood, a Quaker missionary from America, visiting Rochester in 1798 to 1799 recollected an evening at Rickman's house: I 'went into the school room and had a pretty full time with the boys'. Tylor's account of school life suggests that the boys shared the dining room with the family. Generally the relationship between Rickman and his pupils was good and light-hearted. Richard Beck's biographer indicates that through boredom the boys would 'runaway' in the hope that Rickman would 'pull on his *war boots* in [for] pursuit of the fugitives, since by giving them a good start he had all the more pleasure of a country ride in a Post-chaise...' Rickman spent much of his life trying to persuade others to pacifism.

However in a period of continuous warfare it was difficult to impose this stance on his charges. 'Peaceable and peace-loving himself, there was too much enthusiasm for the noble art of self-defence in those warlike times for its boyish practice to be excluded...and there were not wanting retired places in the playground where a lad could prove his prowess in fistic encounters that placed him in higher estimation of his schoolmates...' <sup>7</sup>

By 1811 Rickman was approaching 65 and thinking of retirement, but he continued running the boys school for another couple of years till 1813 when Styles took over the property. Styles had presumably finished his *apprenticeship* by around 1811 and took over the administration of the school then. Rickman's letter of March 1811 to a Friend in the North suggests he had intended to retire to that area, but instead opted to set up a girls school in his personal part of the property to usefully employ his two daughters, Ann and Elizabeth. 'My wife & I have turned our thoughts towards establishing a small school for Girls in our present situation, in doing which the bringing our own two Daughters into usefulness & putting them in a way to do for themselves, has been a very considerable inducement, if not a principle object in our view and our endeavour wherein appear not unlikely to be attended with the desired success. We have now 10 Pupils, 6 of whom are Boarders & have a prospect of more after a little time. My wife & I take an active part therein which affords an agreeable employ, without an overload of care and which I hope may with other small resources in our profession afford a sufficient supply to answer the necessary calls for the support of their Bodies...' <sup>8</sup>

As mentioned in the last issue of *The Clock Tower* (issue 19, August 2010) the poorer Friends' families could not afford to send their children to these *private* Quaker schools. The establishment of Ackworth School in Yorkshire enabled many of these poorer children to receive a good education in this period. Jonathan Griffiths, Rickman's apprentice, had received part of his education there, as did his two corruptible pals, William and John Friend of Shorne. Both the Friend boys were removed from their employment by their father and sent to Horsleydown; presumably to reform them. Another instance of Ackworth not succeeding in turning out 'model' Friends was William Burridge of Gravesend. In 1790 his mother Elizabeth requested that her children should be entered as Quakers so that she could 'have them educated at Ackworth School.' William was enrolled at Ackworth from 1791-3, but later disowned from Rochester meeting for having 'deviated from the line of rectitude, both in regard to religious & Moral Conduct, as to being just cause for Reproach, particularly by keeping evil Company. Absenting himself whole Nights from his Master's House, making use of profane & unbecoming Language & frequently falsifying his word...' <sup>9</sup>

But not all Ackworth pupils turned out that way. Similar to William Burridge, the Elgar boys were not birthright Quakers. Their mother was not a Friend and did not become convinced till 1797. John Elgar, a mariner, moved from Folkestone to Strood in 1794 and requested that his two sons, Richard and Thomas, be considered Quakers, so that they could attend Ackworth. Both boys were

enrolled in 1794 for three years. Richard went onto serve an apprenticeship in Hogstyend in 1798. Thomas was apprenticed to Peter Bassett at Leighton Buzzard as a draper in 1799. Another family in difficulty were the Choats of Gravesend. In 1789 Christopher Choat's business failed and thus the family were unable to pay for the schooling of their eldest daughter, Hannah. In 1791 they approached Rochester meeting for assistance in sending her to Ackworth. Rochester meeting agreed to pay £8 19s for seven-year old Hannah's education in late 1791. She was admitted to the school in 1792 for five years. The family subsequently moved to Suffolk in December 1792, but still asked Rochester meeting in 1793 for assistance in sending their two sons to the same school indicating that their circumstances had not changed.<sup>10</sup>

Whilst William Rickman had built up a prosperous boarding school several of the local parents could not afford his fees and subsequently sent their children a great distance in search of a good education. This would indicate that although there were many *middle* class Quakers, Friends came from a whole cross section of the social strata. Equally evident was the strong emphasis on turning out literate and educated youths, regardless of class or poverty, qualified for a life in trade and business.

## Notes

1. Letter Thomas Marsh to Fowler 1785 cited by Alexander S J, 'Rochester School', *JFHS* (1921) Vol 17 p90; Rickman W, 'Memoir of William Rickman', *The British Friend* (1849) p243; Friends Hist Lib (Pennsylvania), MSS 062 'Gathered Leaves', Letter William Rickman to Friends in America June 1786 f 74a. William Cowper was from New York arriving in Rochester in 1784 and probably knew Rickman in America.
2. Letter Marsh to Fowler 1785; Rickman, 'Memoir of William Rickman', p243; CKS, N/FMc4, Copies of Certificates from Canterbury QM 1785-1823 f27.
3. Rickman, 'Memoir of William Rickman', p243; Godlee Sir R, 'Rochester School', *JFHS* (1921) Vol 17 pp92-93; Milligan E H, *Biographical Dictionary of British Quakers in Commerce and Industry 1775-1920*, (York, 2007) p285.
4. Milligan, *Biographical Dictionary of British Quakers*, pp4, 43, 467; Beck W, *Family Fragments*, (1897) chp ix; Letter Fredric Wheeler to F C Clayton in 1887 cited in Clayton F C, 'Rochester School', *JFHS* Vol 18 p58.
5. Milligan, *Biographical Dictionary of British Quakers*, p4; Letter Wheeler to Clayton 1887; CKS, N/FMc4, Copies of Certificates from Canterbury QM 1785-1823 f58; N/FMc1/3 Canterbury MM 1793-1804; *Annual Monitor 1859*, pp181-2.
6. LSF, Scrapbook N, Prospectus of William Alexander's School, f175; Lancashire RO, FRP14/4, Letter Eaton to Abbott 7 January 1789-extract copied of Rickman's request; Jennings J, *The Business of Abolishing the Slave Trade 1783-1807*, p7; Welcome Library, MS 6961, William Rickman's account 1798 f7; Beck W, *Family Fragments*, (1897) chp ix; Clayton, 'Rochester School', p59; Rickman, 'Memoir of William Rickman', p243.
7. Brinton H H, 'Education', in (ed) Kavanagh J, *The Quaker approach to contemporary problems*, (London, 1953) pp82-3; Beck W, *Family Fragments*, (1897) chp ix; Evans W & T, *The Friends' Library: Comprising journals, Doctrinal treatises, and other Writings of the Religious society of Friends* (Philadelphia, 1844) Vol 8. This incorporates Thomas Scattergood's memoirs pp131-2; <sup>1</sup> Tylor C, 'Schooldays in the Twenties: A Reminiscence for my Grandchildren', *JFHS* (1920) Vol 17 p15.
8. LSF, Temp MS 128/22/118, Letter William Rickman to Thomas Wilkinson 24 March 1811; MALSC, DE0996, Title Deeds of Messuage in Boley Hill, Rochester 1784-1846.
9. Olver A G, *Alphabetical List of Ackworth Scholars 1779-1979*, 5 vols; CKS, N/FMc1/3 Canterbury MM 1793-1804; N/FMc1/2, Canterbury MM 1777-1793.
10. CKS, N/FMc1/3 Canterbury MM 1793-1804; N/FMc1/2, Canterbury MM 1777-1793; N/FQ1/3, Minutes of QM for Kent 1791-1811; Milligan, *Biographical Dictionary of British Quakers*, p162; Sussex RO, 340/15/16, Thomas Elgar's apprenticeship indenture 1799.

## *Edwin Harris – Recollections of Rochester*

Alison Thomas

Archive and Local Studies Assistant, The Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre



*Following Janet Knight's retirement, we are delighted that MALSC Archive and Local Studies Assistant, Alison Thomas, has volunteered to continue this fascinating Clock Tower series. Our thanks to Janet for her wonderful contributions on Edwin Harris and 'what he had to say on the matter...'*

*After completing a degree in medieval and modern history at the University of Birmingham, Alison Thomas trained as a teacher and worked in primary education for several years. Whilst bringing up her family she had various part time jobs within education ranging from playgroup assistant to special needs teacher. Alison left work to become a full time carer for four years, and joined MALSC as Archive and Local Studies Assistant at the end of February 2010.*

### The Crown Hotel and its Famous Patrons.

'The Crown Hotel has three frontages – to the Esplanade, High Street and Gundulf Square (formerly known as Crown Inn Yard). The ancient Crown originally occupied the site of houses at present numbered 4, 6, and 8 High Street. It was in existence in 1316, for we find that Symond Potyn describes himself as 'dwelling in the inne called the Crowne'.

That the Crown was the principal inn of the city there can be no doubt, for many royal and notable visitors stayed there, in bygone days. Francis Thynne, a Kentish man, states that both King Philip of Spain and Queen Mary stayed at the Crown Inn, 'the only place to intertaine princes coming thither'. It was probably at this inn that Chaucer and Canterbury pilgrims stayed.

Queen Elizabeth, in her summer progress into Kent in 1573 – termed by Archbishop Parker a 'cold and wet progress' – arrived at Rochester on September 18<sup>th</sup> and she remained four days at the Crown Inn...

Charles I slept at the Crown on Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> June 1631, after inspecting ships in the lower reach of the Medway and having the next morning seen those in the upper reach he returned to dine at the Crown, attended by lords and officers of the Navy, and he personally thanked them for their 'care and paines'....

During the Civil Wars the Roundheads brought Lord Roper and others taken at Upnor Castle to this inn; and here also about the same period, the Dean of Canterbury was captured – 'as he was going to bed at the Crown.'



*DE402/1/10. Engraving of Rochester seen from Strood Intra, looking across Breach Reach and the River Medway towards Rochester Esplanade, showing from left to right, Rochester Bridge, steps to river, buildings at end of Rochester High Street, **Crown Inn** on corner of High Street and Esplanade (formerly West Gate), Wright's Hotel (later Castle Club), Bridge Chapel and Chamber, Castle Hill, tower of St. Nicholas' Church, entrance to castle gardens through castle curtain wall, Rochester Cathedral, bandstand in castle gardens, Rochester Castle keep, Medway Bathing Establishment and Whitefriars, with a few small boats moored in the River Medway in the middle distance. C.1879 x c.1880 p.9*

## A Merry Party

In 1732 William Hogarth, Scott, Tothall, Thornhill and Forrest, making a merry party stayed at the inn, and in the journal of their holiday printed in 1732, is minutely mentioned their bill of fare at the Crown...They do not appear to have been overcharged at the Crown. There were five travellers; they each had dinner, bed and breakfast, and here is an extract from:

Accounts for Disbursements for Messrs Hogarth and Co.

	£	s.	d.
To paid for beer on the road to Rochester.....	0	0	9
To paid for shrimps at Chatham.....	0	0	9
To paid at the gunnery and dock.....	0	1	6
To paid bill at Rochester .....	1	7	3

That the reputation of the Crown for cheapness must have changed since Hogarth's time is proved by the following anecdote which was told me by an eye witness, the late Henry Ringe, grocer, whose establishment was opposite the Crown Hotel. He told me that the Duke of Wellington, when Warden of the Cinque Ports was journeying from Walmer Castle to London and stopped at the crown to procure fresh horses, that inn being a posting house. He called for a cup of coffee to be brought out to him which he drank whilst seated in the vehicle and was charged £1 1s. In his many later journeys through Rochester the Duke never had refreshments when changing horses!

*If you are interested in reading further candid opinions of Rochester and the bridge, and as recorded by Edwin, please ask staff at MALSC if you can read Recollections of Rochester no. 35.*

## *Archives Update*

Alison Cable, Borough Archivist



### Quarterly Report for the Archives of Great Expectations July to September 2010

This is the third of the quarterly reports, as per the project timetable to catalogue, conserve and make available for research the contents of the 500 boxes of Rochester City Archives, the Archives of Great Expectation.

#### Cataloguing

The cataloguing and appraisal of the Rochester City Archive collection continues. The charters and custumal have been catalogued under the reference RCA/C and the main documents for the Town Clerk and City Surveyor departments have been catalogued under the references RCA/TC and RCA/CS.

Valerie Rouland, the project archivist, is currently working on the Finance documents. Originally, the documents were arranged by record type, however, they have now been re-organised in order to show their provenance. The new arrangement is as follows:

RCA/N1 Chamberlains' records (up to 1837)

RCA/N2 Water bailiffs' records

RCA/N3 Rentals (or 'constats')

RCA/N4 Reference not used

RCA/N5 Treasurers' records (1837 – 1974)

#### Volunteers

Four volunteers have been working on the collection since mid September. They are currently working on the Town Clerk's files: renumbering, repackaging, removing all paperclips, etc.. This ensures that the files will be suitable for handling when the collection is finally made available to the public. This is valuable work and can be quite time-consuming. Some files are encased in folders with metal holding bars or strips that are rusty or sharp. This is not only damaging to the paper but could also cause cuts and abrasions when being handled by researchers. In these cases the papers have to be removed from the metal holders and re-threaded together with archive tape. Our volunteers have tackled the repackaging work with enthusiasm and besides making the files tidy and easier to handle, they are finding that they are able to get a good overview of the sort of information contained within the files.

#### Conservation

The first batch of damaged documents has been sent to a conservation workshop for assessment. The cost of the subsequent work will be met from the archive budget as part of our contribution to the Heritage Lottery Fund Project. The items sent include coroner's records, maps, and an early council minute book. We have also purchased a substantial amount of acid-free folders, brass paper clips, archive tape etc., to be used for repackaging.

# Celebrate with us - Dickens Diorama of Delights

**Wednesday, 8 December, 2pm  
Eastgate House, Rochester**



Celebrate the launch of the unique Percy Fitzgerald collection of Dickens books and memorabilia.

At 2pm, join us for a talk given by Professor Malcolm Andrews, editor of *The Dickensian* and Dr Jeremy Clarke, from the Guildhall Museum, to find out about The Dickens Library and Dickens at the Guildhall Museum.

Later in the afternoon, enjoy a play celebrating Victorian Christmas.

For more information please phone MALSC on 01634 332714.  
Tickets £8 (Friends of Medway Archives members £6),  
phone 01634 338338 to book or visit The Brook Theatre or  
The Central Theatre box offices.

[www.medway.gov.uk/theatrebookings](http://www.medway.gov.uk/theatrebookings)

*Medway*  
COUNCIL

## *A Clock Tower Special Feature*

### *Medway Memories of World War Two and the Battle of Britain*

#### Part Two

#### *Broomhill and the Battle of Britain*

Odette Buchanan



*To follow, and adapted for The Clock Tower, is Odette's talk to the Friends of Broomhill on Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> September 2010 at Strood Library, to commemorate (to the day) the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Messerschmitt 109 crash on Broomhill.*

It is important to remember that Broomhill, that is, the whole hill, not just the park at the top, has always been strategically important. It is probably one of the highest points in Kent at 240 feet (about 80 metres) and has played a significant part in many of the nation's conflicts. Celtic tribes massed here to swoop down on the invading Romans in 43 AD<sup>1</sup>, in an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to halt their advance; from here Simon de Montfort, Earl of Leicester, planned his attack on Rochester and the siege of the castle in 1264. The hill was an important intersection point in the beacons that criss-crossed South East England to relay news of the progress of the Spanish Armada in 1588, and during the last major conflict on English soil, Cromwell's troops were ambushed here by the Royalists in the Civil War. One could stand at the top of the hill until very recently and have a panoramic view of the Thames to the north, Sheerness and the estuary of the Medway to the east, the Medway, Rochester and very significantly, Chatham Dockyard to the south, and Bluebell Hill and the cement and paper-producing villages to the west.

In the aftermath of World War One, the dawn of the 'Brave New World' and the creation of a 'land fit for heroes' even influenced the quiet rural peace of Broom Hill. Part of the hill was a farm owned by Mr. Talbot. In 1919 he divided some of it into plots which he sold for allotments and some into housing plots. All through the 1920s and 1930s housing development crept up the hill on all sides. The more senior members of the Friends of Broomhill remember it as a very rural place, dark and silent at night. They used the grass paths between the allotments for picnics in the daytime and places for courting rendezvous in the evening. One told me the paths provided discreet nooks for a cuddle.

On a more serious note, apprehension mounted throughout the 1930s with no sign of Hitler and Nazi Germany ceasing their expansionist plans. Although there was no huge expenditure by the British government for re-armament, by the late 1930s, having witnessed the horrors of Guernica, local councils were told to put anti-air-raid precautions in place. Organization and infra-structure was set up ready for the mass evacuation of children from the cities, the issue of gas masks, air-raid shelters, the sand-bagging of public buildings, ARP (air raid precautions), Observation Corps and Home Guard volunteers, the meshing of glass on public transport, barrage balloons, blackout arrangements, the fixing of air-raid sirens and the distribution of gas masks.

The ARP had paid officials who organized volunteer wardens. They had stirrup pumps and buckets of water in which to put out incendiary bombs. Then there was the Auxiliary Fire Service. Again, paid officials organizing volunteers. They too, had basic equipment comprising a fire engine and trailer pump to be fixed to a fire hydrant. If the hydrant had been damaged or was not near enough, static water tanks were available. These two organizations were combined into one Civil Defence

Service in 1941. Indeed, Broomhill had a standard concrete ARP post (some were brick-built) on the outside of which a Warden had painted in large white letters 'Hit or Miss' as part of a network around the Towns, a place for the Observation Corps, an *ack ack* gun emplacement, several emergency static water tanks, including one at the Brompton Lane end of Cambridge Road, and an auxiliary fire service station. The Observation Corps provided a vital service that backed up and reinforced the early warning coastal radar. Air Chief Marshall Hugh Caswall Tremeneere Dowding, AOC of 22 Group, said the OC was the RAF's overland air-intelligence network for reporting aircraft movements, both allied and enemy.

When war was declared on 3<sup>rd</sup> September, 1939 one Friend of Broomhill (hereafter called *Friend*) remembers the air-raid siren going off at 11 o'clock to warn the country war had been declared. All plans were put into operation: pregnant women, mothers and babies, schools complete with teachers – all were evacuated from the cities and towns to the countryside. This was code named Operation Pied Piper and involved massive waves of population from the towns and cities. However it was short lived. There was no invasion and by Christmas 1939 around three quarters had returned home. The child evacuees each had a small suitcase or parcel of clothes and food, a gas mask holder round their neck and a label giving their name, age and religion.<sup>2</sup> Gas masks were issued in the expectation that the deadly, corrosive *mustard gas* used in the previous war would be dropped on towns and cities. Signposts were removed to confuse any invaders that landed, tank blocks and *dragon's teeth* were put at strategic points along main roads and the beaches were mined and covered in barbed wire to inhibit landing. Some of these dragon's teeth can still be seen along the river front near Strood Station. There was an anti-tank block at the Castle View end of Jersey Road and opposite was a mortar or machine gun base in what is now an evergreen strip of land. There were, of course, tank blocks on Rochester Bridge.

Many people who had not been called up did voluntary jobs. One of these was fire watching. Both the mother and aunt of one of our committee members used to man the telephones at the fire station then situated on the north-west of the hill near the Coach and Horses pub. They were to phone in location reports of fires caused by incendiary bombs during air-raids. Another member's father did Home Guard duty here as well.

Another member of the Friends recalls a three acre field fronting Broom Hill Road owned by farmer Swain from Higham; he grew lettuces in it every year. (Indeed, Broom Hill is part of a vast swathe of land north and north-east of Strood labelled as 'market gardens' on a 1940 war map.) Since most of Swain's farm hands had been called up and the Land Army had not yet allocated any girls to him, the member remembers one man digging all three acres by hand. It took him six weeks! Yet another Friend when he was digging the garden recently found the enamel sign that had been affixed to an emergency water tank which had stood by their house in Gorse Road. He also remembers his father saw some army officers in the garden with a clipboard and, on making enquiries, was told that, in the event of an invasion, his house would be demolished so that the gunners on the top of Broom Hill could have an uninterrupted view of the Gravesend/Rede Court/Brompton Farm Roads crossing.



*Friend of Broomhill, Gayne Wells, holding the Emergency Water Tank sign found in his garden*

A famous resident of the hill all through the war was the artist Evelyn Dunbar. Her parents used to have three shops in Strood High Street. She was the only official female war artist and many of her commissions were painted in her eyrie at the top of the house where she lived with her parents. Originally, it was one of the several mills on the hill and more recently is now The Cedars hotel on the London Road. Next time you pass look up – her room is at the very top with a panoramic view over the countryside. One of her most famous paintings is of the queue for fish at Hill's fish shop in Strood High Street. Fish was not rationed and so was always in great demand. One Friend's father was a policeman and no matter how long the queue was, he used to go right to the front.

Very few aerial attacks happened. Everyone was on such high alert that on 6<sup>th</sup> September 1939, two Hurricanes took off from the Weald aerodrome in response to what turned out to be a false alarm; they were spotted at Hornchurch where they were mistaken for Messerschmitts and Spitfires were launched in attack. Sadly, both Hurricanes were shot down over the Thames Estuary by the two Spitfire pilots and one of the pilots died. This became known as the battle of Barking Creek, and would have been visible from Broomhill that day. One of the Spitfire pilots, John Freeborn died this year, aged 90. His obituary in *The Times* on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2010, reported that although he had been cleared of any blame for the death of the Hurricane pilot, Montague Hulton-Harrop, his fellow

RAF fighter pilot's death was always in his thoughts. In an interview in 2009 he had said that he thought of Hulton-Harrop's death almost every day of his life.

Yet no invasion came. Hitler continued his rampage across western Europe but life in England continued much as before with some inconveniences such as carrying gas masks, rationing of some foods and the black-out: car headlamps and traffic lights had shutters fitted, no street lights and heavy curtains or frames of light-inhibiting material were fitted tight over windows. The local papers were full of prosecutions for exposing light at night; reasons and excuses varied from, "I had to open the door to let the cat out," to "It rained and the rain washed the black paint off the window." There is also a steady weekly flow of prosecutions of butchers for various rationing contraventions and other retailers for selling things they were not registered to purvey.

The so-called Phoney War continued till the spring of 1940 and many evacuees returned home. The *Rochester, Chatham & Gillingham News* reported that about three-quarters of all those evacuated had returned home by Christmas 1939. One member of the Friends of Broomhill remembers her brother and herself being evacuated to Higham. All was quiet, so their mother walked over the hill and fetched them back home. One Friend had a very unhappy experience of evacuation. She was bullied by the family's daughter and lack of sympathy by the parents. Eventually her parents decided it would be better if she came back home. Back in Strood she was able to watch the dog fights in the summer of 1940 from their back garden and was there at the scene when the Messerschmitt crashed on Broomhill. She also remembers the huge time bomb that landed in Cross Street, directly outside her aunt's house. She watched with awe as the amazingly brave men diffused it.

Over in France Hitler's Blitzkrieg pushed the French army and the British Expeditionary force back to the coast. Rescued from Dunkirk by Operation Dynamo at the end of May 1940, they were severely depleted and had lost much of their equipment. Had they not been rescued, it is quite likely that England would have been invaded. Despite the Medway Towns being very involved in the Dunkirk rescues, there is no mention of it at all in the local papers. A couple of weeks later there are reports of various local people being awarded medals but no mention at all of the actual operation.

The British Expeditionary Forces (BEF) were able to reform and factories like Shorts in Rochester were working flat out to replace the arms and equipment left behind at Dunkirk. The whole nation was inspired by Churchill's famous speech broadcast on 4<sup>th</sup> June, 1940:

"Even though large tracts of Europe and many old and famous states have fallen or may fall into the grip of the Gestapo, and all the odious apparatus of Nazi rule, we shall not flag or fail. We shall go on to the end; we shall fight...on the seas and oceans; we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air; we shall defend our island whatever the cost may be. We shall fight on the beaches; we shall fight on the landing grounds; we shall fight in the fields and in the streets; we shall fight in the hills. We shall never surrender."

Now the war became real. Hitler planned his Blitzkrieg strategy for Britain. Money was desperately needed to produce planes and armaments and savings bonds were issued and National Savings introduced. Again, the local paper was full of stories of people starting up savings clubs where they worked with amazing figures of the amounts saved. Posters exhorting the public to *Dig for Victory*, *Don't be a Squander Bug* and *Make Do and Mend* appeared everywhere. Aluminium saucepans, iron garden railings and gates were donated to the war effort to build planes and tanks. A Friend remembers all the railings from Gordon Road School in Strood being collected and a confrontation between the lady who owned 60 Bryant Road and the men who came to remove the railings from the top of the low wall to her garden. She owned a children's clothing shop opposite.

Everyone was exhorted to keep their food rubbish separate and put it in the pig bin. This waste food was given to pig farmers. As well as this, some neighbours set up pig clubs. A couple of Friends remember that their fathers belonged to such a club. In this case the members kept a pig and fed it on their pig waste. When the pig was slaughtered, it was divided up between the members. Usually about six to eight people were involved.

There were also posters issued dealing with the paranoiac fear of spies: *Careless Talk Costs Lives*. Some had little cartoons of people gossiping on a bus or in a train and sitting behind was Hitler, listening. Spies were often known as Fifth Columnists. This was from an incident in the Spanish Civil War when General Mola had boasted he had four columns besieging Madrid from the outside and a fifth column of secret helpers within.

In the *Rochester, Chatham & Gillingham News* for one week in May 1940, there were two reports concerning suspected spies. One reported that an 18 year old youth had been charged under the Defence Regulations Act "with knowingly having in his possession certain instructions for utilizing means of secretly conveying, receiving or recording information." Detective Inspector Smeed had taken possession of a diary written in code found in the youth's bedroom. The other incident involved a vicar, a policeman and a drunk. The latter had started a conversation with a vicar in a Gillingham hotel. During the course of the conversation, the vicar had mentioned ships in the dockyard, so the drunk called a policeman thinking the vicar was a spy because not only did he talk about ships in the dockyard but he had a foreign accent. The vicar showed the policeman various forms of identification, including his identity card and ration book. The policeman noticed the vicar had a Welsh name. He too was Welsh and so they started talking to each other in Welsh. The drunk instantly thought the policeman was a spy too and insisted on trying to arrest both of them.

Military Intelligence and the German invasion pattern so far led the Government to believe the Germans would try to soften the English up with bombing of strategic targets and civilians. So, the Ministry of Information produced posters, booklets and wall charts for schools and public places pointing out how to tell the difference from the ground between German fighter and bomber airplanes and English ones.<sup>3</sup>

By June 1940 across the Channel, in conquered France, the Germans prepared for invasion. Originally, Hitler had wanted England as an ally to invade Russia but he eventually realized this would not happen and so he now issued War Directive No. 16 which stated: "As England, in spite of her hopeless military position, has so far shown herself unwilling to come to any compromise, I have decided to begin preparations for, and if necessary to carry out, the invasion of England."

This directive was code named Operation Sealion. The objective was to land 160,000 soldiers along a 40-mile coastal stretch of south east England. They had a large armada of ships and barges in channel ports in France, Belgium and Germany. However, Hitler's generals persuaded him to postpone invasion until the English airforce had been destroyed. The crews of the Jagdeschwaders (squadrons) of Messerschmitt ME 109s were stationed in Nord-pas-de-Calais. Although outnumbering the RAF by four to one, and with much more combat experience from Blitzkrieg operations and the Spanish Civil War, they had a healthy respect for the Spitfire and Hurricane pilots and their battle tactics. Coupled with this was the fact that any confrontations would have to be over Allied soil, as the German planes could only able to stay over England for 20 to 30 minutes. Not only this, but by the time they were over the Channel, the Dover *ack ack* guns had them in range. There was the added danger of barrage balloons, and Britain also had radar.

In England, it was accepted that invasion was now imminent and the anti-invasion obstacles set up in the Phoney War were added to. All over south east England open fields were planted with poles

and cables fixed across them to inhibit gliders landing. A Friend recalls how a farm in the Knights' Place area had old cars set in its fields and hawsers strung between steel poles to prevent aircraft landing. The beaches were now mined and covered with concrete blocks and barbed wire. Dummy airfields were built to confuse bombers and more military bases were set up in the south east. The much improved radar was incorporated into a chain of listening posts along the south east coast with taller, bomb resistant and more efficient radio receiving masts firmly embedded into the cliffs above Dover. Most new deployments of troops and anti-invasion devices were around Dover.

Women were not allowed to participate in front line duties. They were conscripted or volunteered into civil defence operations, the Women's Voluntary Service (WVS) or the Land Army. The Land Army had been set up in June 1939 to draft women onto farms where the farm workers had been conscripted into the armed forces. One Friend joined the Land Army and has very fond memories of her work on Hoo Common Farm. Among other things, she remembers her pet goat, Twinkle. Twinkle used to go everywhere with her – including Reeves China Shop in Rochester! The Anderson shelter, like so many, was flooded. They never used it to shelter in but because it was nice and cool, they used to store the milk and illicit cream they made on the farm.

The Observation corps was strengthened and linked from strategically placed posts to HQ in Maidstone. Kent and Essex airfields were supplied with more squadrons of Spitfire and Hurricane fighter planes and newly trained pilots, many of whom came from occupied Europe, USA and the Empire. There were 24 pilots from India, one of whom was Squadron Leader Mahinder Sing Pujji who died in Darent Valley hospital this week (September 2010). He had flown Hurricanes and was believed to be the last surviving fighter pilot of this group; there is an exhibition commemorating his life at Gravesham Civic Centre. The weather must have been a nasty shock for those coming from warmer climes, and the winter of 1939/40 was one of the coldest on record. Hundreds of Polish airmen arrived at Eastchurch on Sheppey to learn English and to learn how to fly English planes. By March, 1940 there were 1,300 Polish airmen in England.

In June and July 1940, the Germans started attacking Allied coastal defences and shipping convoys in the Channel, but still the ever dwindling fleet of fighter planes kept harassing them, despite most crews working a 16-hour day. All during July, as Phase One of the battle neared its end, dog fights were a common sight in the skies over Kent. They were called dog fights because the strategy was to get behind your enemy to shoot him down. Many Friends of Broomhill remember watching these dog fights, which was called *goofing* – presumably because it was dangerous to be out in the open and the silliest dog was Mickey Mouse's friend Goofy.

One time a Friend was watching from Gordon Road when an incendiary bomb fell on the corner of Moore Street. Another time, he witnessed a Hurricane crashing into a house on the corner of Temple Street and remembers being rooted to the spot: he thought it was going to hit him. Another time he was on the allotment on Broomhill with his father watching the aircraft fly over. They could hear the rattle of the machine guns from the planes. "Get down, lad!" yelled his dad, and again, he was too scared to move. This reminded him that he also listened at night to the anti-aircraft guns – the *ack ack* and Bofors guns which made a tremendous noise. Sometimes he would go outside and watch them. He said there were quick bursts, with a noise like, "dddddddd dddd dddd." Then you would see bright balls going up in the air.<sup>4</sup>

One Friend lived near the huge gun at Upnor called Big Lizzie. One night they were in their Anderson shelter and her mum and dad were standing at the door watching the action. Big Lizzie opened up and as her shell went overhead the blast took their hair up - like Punk Rockers! Another Friend also remembers the Z battery anti-aircraft rockets at Chattenden. He and his friends used to collect the shell splinters. Yet another Friend remembers the HE bomb that landed in Cross Street, mentioned earlier and which did not explode but the area had to be evacuated. Ropes were

stretched across Montfort Road and Glanville Road and one was supposed to go down Brompton Lane and round Montfort Road. He and a chum ducked under the ropes and tried to get back to the friend's house in Cross Street; they were stopped by a Special Constable and sent straight back. He and many other Friends remember collecting shrapnel. These sharp, jagged colourful abstract shaped lumps of metal were from bombs designed to explode and cause casualties over a wide area. Friends remember a swopping traffic in shrapnel with the most sought after being the pieces that had the brass timer bits at the front and with copper banding at the back.

Another Friend had a damson tree in the front garden. A large piece of shrapnel lopped off one of the branches, but not quite. It lodged in the join and the local policeman came to see if they were all right. The Friend was standing at the gate, under the damson tree, talking to her father when her father watched in horror as the huge bough started to slowly separate from the tree. Her father charged the policeman, the only time he *legally* knocked one down - and he got thanked for it. She also remembers a family who lived nearby who had no fear of the heat of the shrapnel for as soon as the bombs fell they were out scavenging for as much as possible even though it was burning hot.

Many Friends had memories of the air-raids. One attended Wainscott School and they were the fastest runners because if the siren went when they were half way across the field, the school gates would be locked by the headmaster as the siren finished. Local people would take them in instead: the head was not a very nice person. One Friend also recalls that when the siren went off, the first one down the shelter was their dog, Rex.

The long, hot summer continued until the end of July 1940. Then, as well as cloudy weather at the beginning of August, there was a lull in combats. This allowed anti-air-raid arrangements to be consolidated and the RAF a few days to build up reinforcements. Also, by this time, British pilots and crews had been joined by many immigrant refugee airmen fleeing Nazi rule, not only from Poland but also France, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Denmark and Norway. Volunteer pilots also arrived from the United States, Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand.

In early August, Marshall Kesselring, Commander of Luftflotte 2, and Reichsmarshal Goering discussed the next phase as they looked at the Dover radar masts through their binoculars. Goering relayed their plans to the commanders: air supremacy was vital and all Channel shipping needed to be destroyed. The destruction of the early warning radar masts and stations was essential and following this there was to be concerted attacks on all south eastern airfields.

On 8<sup>th</sup> August 1940, a convoy of 20 merchant ships loaded with coal and coke for industries in Swanage left the Medway with a heavy naval protection patrol. A German Stuka squadron attacked them all day and eventually only four ships reached Swanage, although attacking Hurricanes decimated the Stuka squadron. The Germans called this Adlerangriff, Eagle Day, and it signalled the start of the Luftwaffe's efforts to destroy the RAF. There followed air-raids resulting in heavy military and industrial losses with many civilian casualties as well. On 12<sup>th</sup> August 1940, the Luftwaffe heavily bombed the radar stations and masts. Goering had wanted their total destruction, but despite severe damage, they continued to operate.

The invasion had to be postponed yet again and the bombardments continued with severe damage to many Kent airfields and their planes. There were many casualties and deaths to both ground staff and resting crews. 15<sup>th</sup> August 1940 was a clear afternoon and in Kent the harvest was being collected. On their way were 90 Dornier KG3s, led by Oberst Wolfgang von Chamier-Glisczinski, with an escort of 130 ME109s and sixty more from the crack JG26. These spread out to distract the English fighters. Von Glisczinski sent 45 Dorniers to bomb Eastchurch and the rest headed for the Rochester aircraft factories: Shorts Brothers and Pobjoys.<sup>5</sup> The aim, of course, was to halt production of planes – especially fighter ones, though Shorts produced 4-engine bombers not fighter

planes. The bombing set back production severely and they were further inhibited by another raid on 2<sup>nd</sup> September when the drawing office was hit.

Several members of the Friends worked at Shorts at that time. The air-raid shelters were tunnels in the cliffs on the south bank of the Medway, right behind the factory and under the Borstal Road. One member told me that when the siren went all the workers had to quickly down tools and evacuate to the tunnels. To hasten this, the management used to play "Run rabbit, run rabbit, run, run, run," a popular song at the time, over the tannoy.

The onslaught continued as did the death and destruction on every Kent and airfield in the south east of England, and always coupled with many records of bravery and devotion to duty. Churchill broadcast another inspiring speech to the nation on the evening of 19<sup>th</sup> August 1940:

"The gratitude of every home in our island, in our Empire and indeed throughout the world, except in the abodes of the guilty, goes out to the British airmen who, undaunted by odds, are turning the tides of the world war by their prowess and by their devotion.

Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few."

On Friday 30<sup>th</sup> August the weather became more autumnal and the invasion had to be postponed yet again. On the last day of August, Fighter Command suffered its heaviest losses with 39 aircraft shot down and 14 pilots killed, but, the Germans lost 41 aircraft. The Battle entered its final phase in September. The defence situation was desperate with many airfields out of action, equipment and planes in short supply and pilots either exhausted or new with little training and no experience. It was essential to keep the South East guarded to prevent the Germans gaining control over the skies. Around this time a Friend remembers a German plane being shot down in a field at Upnor. She thinks it may have been trying to bomb Chatham Dockyard. The pilot dropped all his bombs in the meadow and this knocked off their roof and the 10lb of damson jam her mother had made was splattered all over the floor. This same Friend also remembers an *ack ack* station at Upnor manned by the ATS. The German planes used to strafe them while they were bombing the dockyard, and as the girls ran, the bullets hit the road outside their house. The Friend remembers standing at the door watching the little spurts of dust flying up off the dirt road. She also remembers a land mine dropping in the fields near Wainscott School, and she and her friends all hoped it would blow up the school. They could see the green parachute attached to it from their vantage point on the hill and were all disappointed when the army dismantled it.

The pressure was intensified by night raids which inhibited repairs and often caused civilian casualties by mistake. Hitler had specifically banned the bombing of civilian targets as he still hoped for a negotiated peace with Britain, but the British government did not know this and in retaliation for these accidental bombings, the RAF bombed Berlin. Hitler was furious and told Goering to "exterminate British cities" as retribution. Now more civilian bombing was feared so the children who had returned home from the previous Phoney War evacuations were evacuated again, but this time well away from the danger zone of the South East. The local paper quotes about a third of the child population being evacuated to Wales at the end of May, 5,000 more in June and yet another 700 towards the end of June. Hitler expected increased bombing to lower British morale and thus clear the way for invasion, but he was very wrong. As far as possible, people tried to carry on as usual, and workers still arrived in Kent for the annual hop picking but this time with their gas masks.

In spite of continued heavy losses of airfields, planes and crews, the indomitable RAF held on and managed to intercept and shoot down many Luftwaffe bombers and escort ME 109s on their way to and returning from London. The volunteer pilots from Europe, the Empire and the USA contributed greatly to many Nazi casualties and losses. On 13<sup>th</sup> September, Hitler's Chiefs of Staff told him that opposition was weak and German casualty rates low. They lied but this led him to

decide 17<sup>th</sup> September would be the day to launch Operation Sealion. On 15<sup>th</sup> September the Luftwaffe launched a massive attack intended to “clear the skies of RAF.” Once again there were devastating casualties and deaths, but still RAF planes were there protecting the skies and harassing the flights bound for London, causing many to jettison their bomb loads and head back to base in northern France.

On 30<sup>th</sup> September 1940 there were three major attacks. The day ended with the loss of 47 enemy aircraft as against 20 RAF fighters. The bombing of London and other major cities continued throughout October but morale held firm and eventually by November 1940 the Luftwaffe had run out of steam and the Battle petered out. Goering was given new orders to night bomb London and major cities; once again the invasion was postponed and the armada of ships and barges disappeared from the Channel ports.

Henry Smetham, the Strood historian,<sup>6</sup> lived in Goddington Road on the Frindsbury side of the hill. In a letter to his nephew dated 3<sup>rd</sup> December, 1940 he wrote:

“A time bomb fell about 2ft 4inches diameter and nearly 6 foot long!

Happily, its central steel band burst and the same night came a deluge of rain which neutralized it. The R.E took it out. Incendiary bombs – not great ones have been many. They have been doused without damage. About 6 (smaller) time bombs of the “whistling” variety fell from 250 – 400 yards from here. The wind N.W brought the sound so near that I felt we were in for it! Happily not so – nor did either of them injure life or property – save a few smashed windows and blew an Anderson Shelter out of the ground like cardboard! But being no alert (air-raid warning) the people were indoors.”

In 1940 there were two types of shelter, the brick built street ones and Anderson shelters. Locally, the street ones had no lighting, though some towns had installed electric lights and these had been vandalised. In the Medway Towns hurricane lamps had been installed, but these too had been vandalized. Anderson shelters were an arch of corrugated steel supported by stronger steel girders and sunk into a hole in the back garden. The earth removed was banked around to protect the shelter from blast – not always successfully, as Smetham records. They were named after the Home Secretary Sir John Anderson and were free to manual workers and families with incomes of less than £250 per year; others could buy them for £7. The stronger, indoor Morrison steel shelter came later and were only available to those with health problems.

Despite the Luftwaffe, in their own words, “slowly bleeding to death,” Goering still felt confident that an invasion was possible. An indication of this confidence was his allowing Mussolini to send a flight of the Italian air force to participate in what he considered were the last raids before invasion. The *ack ack* gunners at Dover were amazed at this unusual sight and opened fire and immediately, the Italians turned tail and headed for home without dropping any bombs.

Fortunately for Britain, Hitler eventually changed his plans, and so, the first battle to be decided purely by aerial power and the first to use mainly aircraft as both an offensive and defensive weapon just petered out, not with a bang but with a whimper. His change of plans gave the RAF time to regroup and replace its sadly depleted resources. The battle had been won by the indomitable and unwaveringly high morale of both civilians and the military and battle strategy and tactics overcame superior numbers. Innovative inventions and improvements, dedicated factory workers and ground crews all contributed to the British success. Many airfields, however, had been bombed to destruction and there was much to do to consolidate the victory. The Blitz continued through the winter of 1940 to 1941 and victory went unnoticed. Indeed, there were serious controversies in high places and both Air Vice-Marshal Sir Keith Rodney Tremenhare Dowding and Air Chief Marshal Sir Hugh Caswall were moved from their commands rather than being praised for their conduction of the battle. Churchill’s speeches inspired everyone to *do their bit* and

*never surrender*. He was surely right when he said that never was so much owed by so many to so few.



*The Messerschmitt 109 crash on Broomhill, 30<sup>th</sup> September 1940.  
With thanks to the Friends of Broomhill.*

## Sources and Acknowledgements

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and especially the friends of Broomhill who shared their memories of the war and allowed the inclusion of their memories in this talk.

## Editor's Notes

1. Current historical thought questions an invasion of Britain by the Romans. Evidence suggests that there was more of a cultural absorption which also facilitated the economic position of the resident population.
2. See *The Clock Tower* Issue 17, February 2010; A Clock Tower Special Feature, *The Great Evacuation*.
3. See *The Clock Tower*, Issue 19, August 2010, *1939 to 1945, A Little Lad Remembers...* by Bob Ratcliffe.
4. See *The Clock Tower*, Issue 9, February 2008, *Borstal's Wartime Umbrella*, by Peter Burstow.
5. Short Brothers were pioneers in the building of aircraft at The Esplanade, Rochester in the first half of the twentieth century. Articles and information on the company can be found in the following past editions of *The Clock Tower*: Issue 02, June 2006; Issue 03, August 2006; Issue 12, November 2008; Issue 14, May 2009; Issue 20, August 2010.
6. See *The Clock Tower*, Issues 14, May 2009, Issue 15, August 2009 and Issue 16, November 2009, *Henry Smetham – A Busy Life* by Odette Buchanan.

Back issues of *The Clock Tower* can be viewed on the FOMA website at [www.foma-lsc.org/newsletter.html](http://www.foma-lsc.org/newsletter.html) and by clicking on *Other issues*.

**Do you have any memories or anecdotes of Broomhill, Strood or Medway in the war or the Battle of Britain that you would like to share with others? Contact Odette Buchanan on 01634 718231 or email [odette\\_buchanan@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:odette_buchanan@yahoo.co.uk)**

More Broomhill wartime stories will be included in the next issue of *The Clock Tower*.

## *Medway Memories*

JL Keys



*FOMA member John Keys shares some more of his Medway memories to complete the second part of this special feature.*

I have previously related in Issues 16 and 17 of *The Clock Tower*, how my school, Gillingham County School, was evacuated to Sandwich at the start of the war, but when the Germans broke through to the Channel coast, we suddenly found ourselves closer to the enemy than was deemed desirable. So the school decamped post-haste to South Wales. Some of us pupils, at the behest of our parents, did not go.

My father had rented a house in Canterbury on the outbreak of hostilities, no doubt thinking it would be safer than in the Medway Towns, with all its prime military and naval targets. Whilst he remained in Gillingham because of his work, Mother and the rest of the family spent about nine months residing just around the corner from the historic St. Martin's church. I cycled up from Sandwich each week to see them, with the permission of the Headmaster, of course.

The divided family was reunited when my parents rented a house in Wigmore in the summer of 1940. We were notified that the remnants of my school were combining with the remnants of the Mathematical School, with a mixture of teachers from both schools, to start the autumn term in the unoccupied building of the Chatham Girls county (now the Grammar) School) at the top of Chatham Hill. My memory is not perfect, but I think we started at 8.30 a.m. and finished at 2.00 p.m. each day, with half an hour break for lunch, Mondays to Fridays. Mr Parsons (Snips), the Deputy Headmaster of the County School took over as acting Headmaster. So began my fifth, and what turned out to be, final year at school.

I did not keep a diary, so cannot pinpoint a date, but it was after the Germans started their daylight bombing raids. It was our mid-morning break and we were in the playground when, without any warning, a group of enemy bombers passed overhead, and there was the dreaded sound of a bomb falling. Naturally we all ran towards the shelter of the school building. I rushed through the main entrance and tripped over the inert body of the Headmaster lying on the floor. I think I can say it is very rare for a pupil to kick a headmaster in the face and get away with it. Luckily he was not too badly damaged. Where that solitary bomb ended up, I know not, but it could not have been a very big one.

One of the extra-curricular activities that some of the senior boys took part in was fire watching. Our job was to notify the authorities if an incendiary bomb set light to school buildings, not to tackle the bombs. In the early days of the war, the public was encouraged to tackle the nasty little things by tipping a bucket of sand over them, thereby dousing the flames. But the Germans got wise to this and started to insert small delayed-action explosive devices with the result that members of the public were advised to steer clear of them until the things had exploded. There were buckets of sand everywhere being more effective than a bucket of water which would merely spread the flames. Both sides used incendiary bombs (dropped in large clusters) to light up the target before dropping the high explosive. Most public buildings and large premises had fire watchers on duty at night or at any time that a building would have otherwise been unoccupied.

When we heard that an Air Training Corps squadron was being formed in Gillingham (1039 Squadron), some friends and myself went along to enrol, and to our surprise were greeted by Mr. Parsons, adjutant of the new unit. A First World War pilot, Squadron leader Metcalfe, was the commanding officer. Incidentally 1039 Squadron was situated in our old school buildings in Third

Avenue, part of which had been taken over as a rest centre, so we felt quite at home. We had a midweek evening parade and another on Sunday mornings, at which we drilled, had instruction in the Morse code and aircraft recognition, and had talks from visiting RAF officers. Our uniforms were similar to the RAF but buttoned up to the neck. No ties and a bit warm in the summer sun. A visit to Detling Aerodrome was arranged and I remember being slightly disheartened to see bullet holes in the fuselages of the Boulton-Paul Defiants being patched up, particularly in the area around the gun turret behind where the pilot sat. It is perhaps worth noting that the Defiants being two-seaters and therefore heavier and slower than the Spitfires and Hurricanes, were soon taken off daytime interception duties and became night time fighters.

Finishing school early gave us plenty of opportunities to witness the battles in the skies above, sometimes too close for comfort, as when a Messerschmitt 109 came swooping low over our garden closely chased by a Spitfire, guns blazing. On other occasions seeing parachutes drifting down, and an airman falling to his death with a half opened parachute. Other vivid memories come to mind. Watching from my bedroom window Stuka dive-bombers going down almost vertically to dive bomb Chatham Dockyard one morning. I also recall looking down a neat, round hole in Wigmore Road before being warned it was an unexploded bomb which was ticking. Then there was the utter devastation caused by the aerial land mine which had fallen on Wickham Street in the Delce, Rochester, not far from my grandparents' house in Cecil Road; Catherine Street was also badly damaged at the time.

I left school in 1941 aged 16, having gained my School Certificate, today's equivalent of GCSEs, and being taken on as a junior clerk at County Hall. Joining the ARP (Air Raid Precautions) as a messenger made life a bit more interesting and also added another uniform to my wardrobe. It included a battledress, beret and tin hat and large army style boots: in my case, size 10. Duties as a messenger meant reporting to the nearest ARP warden whenever an air raid warning sounded. At that time there was no warden's post nearby, so we just assembled at the local warden's house. Luckily no bad incidents occurred at Wigmore in 1940 and 1941 that I can remember, but loss of sleep was a problem as we still had to go to work the next day. There was an all night exercise involving all the Civil Defence services which assumed that the Medway Towns was being heavily bombed. All we messengers from outlying areas were called in by central control and we spent a hectic night cycling around the towns carrying messages to or from HQ, which was situated in Fort Amherst, underground, behind Chatham Town Hall. It ended at about 5.30 a.m. when we all had to report to the Central hotel where Mrs. Cox, the landlady, handed out liver sausage sandwiches and mugs of tea. Great fun!

In 1942 we moved back to our own house in Woodlands Road, Gillingham, so I transferred to the Warden's Post in the grounds of Gillingham Museum, once the home of Brennan the inventor.

## *Cindy's Little Gems*

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.*

### The Old Age Pensions Act 1908

With pensions currently a topical subject, this edition of *Little Gems* looks at the Chatham Borough Pensions registers.<sup>1</sup> With the rising older population in Britain, the Government are telling us all that we must work longer before we will receive our pension and means testing is again a possibility. In 1908 The Old Age Pension Act came into force, the first time an almost universal pension scheme had been introduced. The Bill eventually passed through Parliament by Lloyd George's government after much heated discussion and dissention. The qualifying age to receive this new benefit was 70 years and it was strictly means tested. It was the first general old age pension paying a non-contributory amount between two and five shillings per week; the Liberal Government announced that January 1st 1909 was Pension Day.

The criteria for receiving this benefit were exceedingly strict and the huge numbers of claimants who began to lodge their claim to the new benefit in December 1908 were not all successful. Those who had an income exceeding £21 per annum, were not British subjects, had been in prison in the preceding ten years, had habitually failed to work, or had failed to make provision for old age from the age to 50 or 60 were all unable to claim. Claims were submitted via the Post Office and were then vetted by the local Pensions Officer; the Local Pensions Committee looked at appeals.

The very first applicant noted in the book was Mary Ann Parrett of 58 Lester Road, Chatham; who lodged her claim on 1<sup>st</sup> December 1908 and was awarded 5 shillings<sup>3</sup> per week. Women made up the greater number of applicants locally and nationally, outnumbering men twenty-seven to one.<sup>4</sup> John Rogers of Medway Union tried to claim but he was refused on the grounds that he had habitually failed to maintain himself. Those claiming Parish Relief were not considered for payment under section 3<sup>5</sup> of the Act unless for medical reasons.

Sadder cases were those who had lodged their claims only to die before the long awaited pension arrived. Frank Lilley of 148 Ordnance Street lodged his claim on 1<sup>st</sup> December 1908 and was awarded 5 shillings per week to be paid on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1909. The excitement was obviously too much and poor Frank duly died on 30<sup>th</sup> December 1908. Louisa Martin did the same, completed her form on December 1<sup>st</sup> and expired on December 2<sup>nd</sup>. Many were turned down because they could not prove their age. Julia Gray of 275 Luton Road claimed but was turned away as she had no proof of age. She appealed to the tribunal in October 1910 and proof was obviously obtained as she was awarded her pension of 5s backdated to July 1910. Jane White also of Luton Road applied for her pension in April 1910 only to be told that she would not be 70 until April 1911. Applicants applying for a pension fraudulently could be jailed for six months with hard labour although no doubt there were still those who took a chance.

Lewis Thomas Tyler of 1 Warner Street, was turned down as his annual income exceeded £31.10s 0d. This probably included not only his income, but furniture and chattels in his house. Originally the Conservative opposition had wanted every applicant to be assessed not only on income but goods and even their clothes. Parliament had turned this down as unworkable, requiring assessors to visit every single applicant. The original proposal had also recommended turning down anybody

who had claimed poor relief in the preceding 20 years. William Hoeck of Dale Street was also refused a pension as his income exceeded the allowance, but his wife was awarded 3shillings per week. The Contributory Pension Act of 1925 later superseded the 1908 Act.

There are two surviving volumes of Pension Registers listing a large number of elderly applicants, showing their address and amount of pension or reason for refusal. If you have an ancestor living in Chatham at this period you may well find them listed. Spare a thought for the poor sub postmasters and local board officials, who dealt with the huge deluge of applicants on 1<sup>st</sup> December 1908 without computers!

## Notes

1. Chatham Borough Archives (CBA/A4/34)
3. 25p
4. *Hansard*
5. Claim form schedule 1

## *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.*

In an ideal world I would have been using this Christmas edition of *The Clock Tower* to suggest that you might like to buy your friends and family copies of the EPE paperback, *The Medway Towns: River, Docks and Urban Life*. Instead I am still working on the revisions of the text and publication is now planned for spring/summer 2011.

The delays are partly attributable to my having taken up a new full-time post as a history lecturer at the University of Greenwich, so book revisions have to be fitted in around a busy teaching schedule. Most of the teaching focuses on life in early modern England and the past three years working on the history of the Medway Towns has provided me with a wealth of primary source materials to share with my students, providing real life-stories to illustrate the themes we need to tackle.

For example, when talking about population, disease and famine, they get to look at pages from the parish registers which show how plague killed so many people in Chatham in 1666 and 1667. They also see the lists made by parish officials in the hungry years of the 1590s showing how many families in the area were thought to be at risk of going hungry and read the documents which list the elderly and sick who were reliant on poor relief. For example, in Strood in 1598 the list of those 'relieved by the parish' consisted of three elderly widows, two lame men, a young orphaned brother and sister and the unfortunate William Partington, aged 12, 'his toes rotted off'<sup>1</sup>. All of these small details bring the dry statistics to life and offer students the opportunity to measure what they can read for themselves against the theories and ideas of the historians whose work they study.

Personal records can be equally illuminating about life in the past, with dairies and wills offering glimpses of family life. The historian Edward Hasted's memoir tells of the gay social whirl enjoyed by his family in mid-eighteenth century Chatham and of the 'distress of sorry ...and the uproar of scandal throughout the neighbourhood,' caused by his 14 year old sister Anne's elopement with a young marine officer.<sup>2</sup> The will of Strood fisherman James Hutchison, written in 1779, effectively excluded his wife Susanna from enjoying his considerable wealth because of her 'cross, unkind behaviour at all times showed to me she being at no time a wife to me in any respect whatsoever.'<sup>3</sup>

These snapshots of past lives help to bring history to life. They encourage students to understand that history is about more than passively reading what other people have written in books and they learn that there are whole archives full of material waiting to be plundered for new and interesting information about life in the past.

So when *The Medway Towns: River, Docks and Urban Life* does finally appear in the New Year, you can expect to find more local details from the archives bringing the history of the Medway Towns to life.

An Account of the Number of Persons who died  
of the Plague at Chatham between 16<sup>th</sup> March 166<sup>6</sup> and  
and 7<sup>th</sup> July 166<sup>7</sup> extracted from the Parish Register

March 166 <sup>6</sup>	7
April	20
May	40
June	46
July	135
August	111
September	75
October	66
November	24
December	5
January 166 <sup>7</sup>	3
February	2
<u>Total</u>	<u>534</u>

When the disorder raged at the  
highest degree the burials amounted to 7.829  
in the day —

cc

A page from the Parish Registers of St Mary's, Chatham detailing the number of deaths from plague in the town in 1666 and 1667; MALSC P85/1/4.

## Notes

1. CKS SA D593/S/4/14/12
2. E. Hasted, 'Anecdotes of the Hasted Family', *Archaeologica Cantiana*, 26, (1904), pp277-284.
3. TNA, Prob 11/1074, James Hutchison, 8 February 1781.

## 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.*

## The Medway Cholera Outbreak of 1849

*In Issue 5 of The Clock Tower in February 2007, I wrote an article on the cholera outbreak in Lambeth in 1848 and 1849. This was in response to a family history question by distant cousin and FOMA member Susan Algar, who realised something out of the ordinary had happened on the South Bank of The River Thames at the time. An obsession with the outbreak and the history of Lambeth ensued, culminating in the publication of the book, The Lambeth Cholera Outbreak of 1848-1849: The Setting, Causes, Course and Aftermath of an Epidemic in London, published by McFarland and now available worldwide. I was delighted when the FOMA Committee asked me to give a talk at Frindsbury and set about investigating the Medway side of the story. The talk in September was very well attended, and I was particularly touched that so many members and friends had travelled some considerable distance to support me and to hear the talk. Naturally many were unable to come and for this reason a condensed version of the text now follows.*

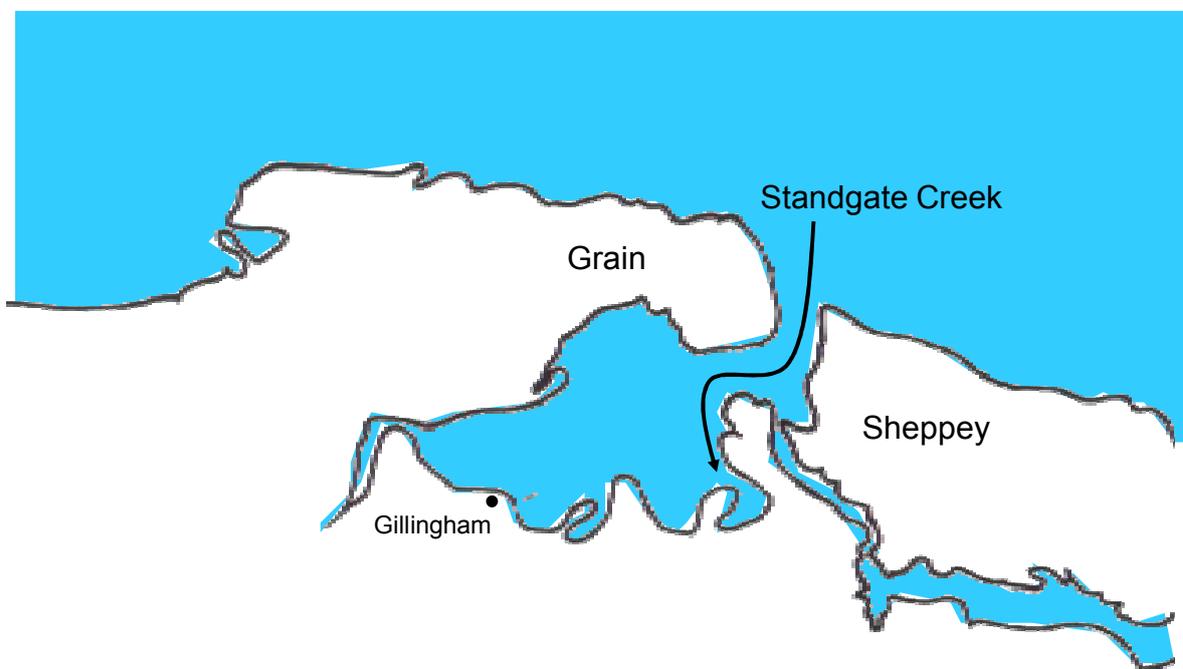
Cholera was first reported in England at the port of Gateshead in 1821, and the first epidemic started there in 1831. The disease returned to Britain each decade with epidemics in 1848 to 1849, 1854 and 1866. Any talk of cholera induced fear in the authorities and the population as the disease arrived without warning and killed at speed. By the end of the long hot summer of 1849 over 70,000 people in England alone had died of cholera. The outbreak had begun a year earlier but did not reach its peak till the September of 1849. Such a national catastrophe should have been etched into the memory of every person in Britain, but the cholera epidemic of 1848 to 1849 was forgotten. Perhaps because for those who survived the memory was too painful, but also because it was easier for the authorities not to remind the working population of their responsibility to provide adequate housing and sanitation.

Today commentators write mostly of the Great Stink of 1858 and the 1854 epidemic when the medical world began to accept the theory of Dr John Snow (1813-1858) that cholera is a water borne disease. The popular story is that Snow realised there was a connection between those falling ill and the drinking of sewage-tainted water from the pump in Broad Street – now Broadwick Street – in Soho, London. Yet Snow had known this at least ten years earlier from his observations of the habits of Lambeth's water front population and their collection of drinking water from the polluted River Thames.

By the end of the summer of 1849, in London of a population of around 2 million, 14,538 perished, the largest proportion of which was in Lambeth and the southern shore of the Thames. By the spring of 1849 cholera had spread to Kent, and statistics suggest around 665 in Medway died from cholera and 182 from diarrhoea. In Kent, excluding the Medway figures, around 545 died of cholera and 308 of diarrhoea, a total in Kent of about 1,698 who died of cholera and related conditions. The worst affected areas were Gravesend, Gillingham, Milton next Sittingbourne, Sheppey, Margate, Canterbury and East Farleigh. In East Farleigh 300 hop pickers fell ill and around 45 died. The statistician William Farr (1807-1883), the first Compiler of Abstracts for the General Register Office, commented that the mortality from cholera there was “with one or two exceptions, confined to the vagrants, chiefly Irish, who came into the parish of East Farleigh to obtain employment by picking hops.”

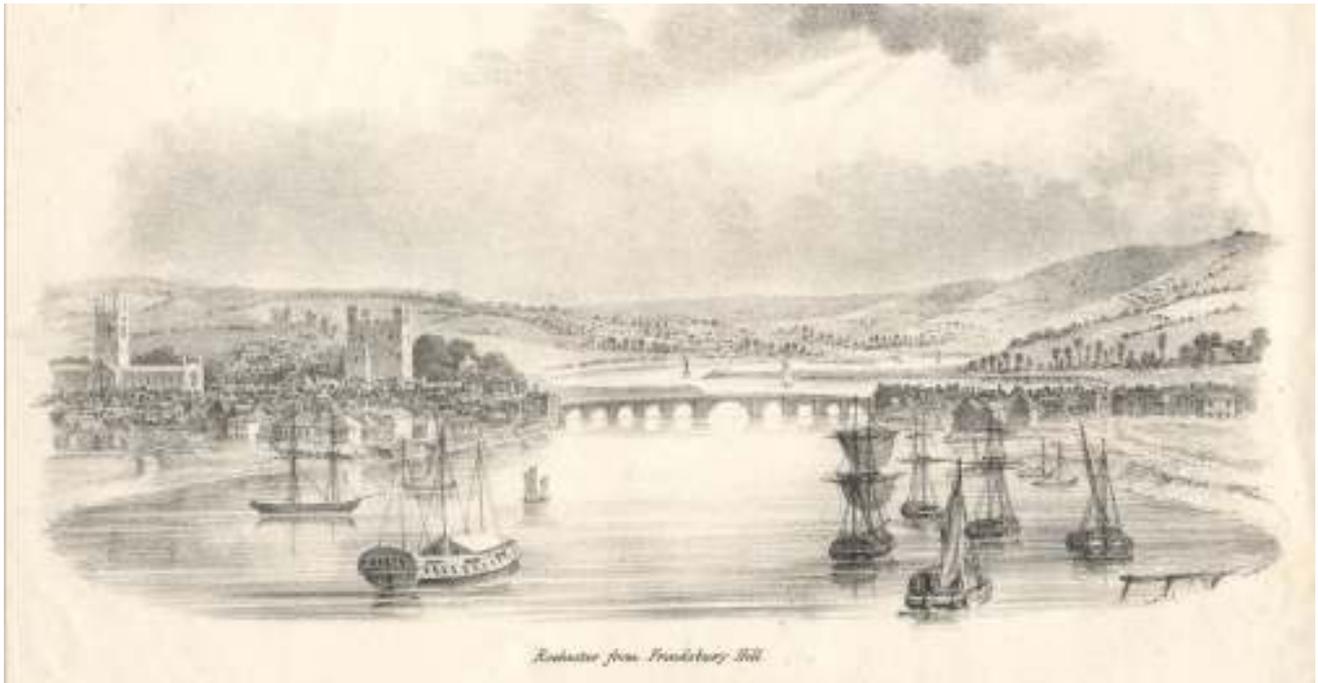
In his *Report on the Mortality of Cholera*, Farr did not compile statistics and reports of the epidemic in London alone and his work also included Kent and the Medway Towns. Farr reported on a weekly basis in *The Times* newspaper and his statistics were as accurate as they could be as they were derived from the registration of deaths. However, in his work for the Victoria County History, FOMA member Peter Lyons found reports from the *Rochester, Chatham and Strood Gazette* which add flesh to the bones of Farr's reports.

It would appear that cholera reached the Medway area far sooner than originally thought, and an incident in December 1848 may explain one origin of the outbreak. The *Gazette* reported that a Dutch ship called the *Laurens Koster*, had left Rotterdam early in November. The ship was carrying troops - and another hidden passenger. By the time the vessel had reached the point between Beachy Head and the Isle of Wight, cholera had already broken out. Four soldiers, the ship's carpenter and cook all died fairly swiftly and the ship was sent to Standgate Creek, a quarantine area in the Medway (see below). Here the deaths went up to 14, one of the dead being chief mate. It is possible that cholera bacteria were released into the estuarine waters of the river - the cholera bacteria's natural environment - and lay dormant until the water temperature increased.



Farr recorded the arrival of cholera in Kent in January 1849 with a possible outbreak in Bexley and a confirmed case in Gillingham. A further outbreak in Chelsfield in March and on a schooner offshore Milton shows that cholera can still attack even in the winter, though it is likely that the bacteria had been contained in the bilges of the schooner and had mixed with the water supply in some way. The records do not state where the schooner had been prior to its arrival in Milton, so the cholera may have been transported by a human host onto the vessel.

Further details on these incidents are not available, however what is certain is that as the weather warmed, the number of cases began to increase. In May an outbreak in Milton killed 9, a widow, aged 61 who died within 24 hours and a child aged 4 who succumbed after only 8 hours.



*Rochester 1840.*

*From the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre, Couchman Collection*

*Reproduced by kind permission of the Director of Regeneration, Community and Culture.*

By June, cholera had spread to Chislehurst, Erith, Gravesend and to Strood. The *Rochester, Chatham and Strood Gazette* also reported 13 deaths in Rainham ‘due to want of cleanliness and scanty or unwholesome diet.’ It is interesting that observers were aware that the disease attacked the malnourished, though at the time they did not understand why they were more vulnerable.

The first death in Strood was of Esther Perrin on 20<sup>th</sup> June. Esther Perrin was born Esther Davison in about 1796, probably in the Strood area. Esther married first to Timothy Walker in 1803, and my thanks to Tessa Towner for finding this marriage and therefore Esther’s maiden name. Esther had seven children with Timothy: James, Timothy, Susanna, John Calcroft, Elizabeth, Catherine and Mary Anne. Timothy the elder died in 1813, and four years later in 1817, Esther married Jacob Perrin a shoemaker with a shop in Strood High Street. With Jacob, Esther had at least eight more children: Edward, William, Henry, Thomas, Frederic, George, Mary and Robert.

By the time of the cholera outbreak in 1849, some of Esther’s many children appear not to have not survived, others had moved away; some have proved too difficult to trace. It is likely that Esther brought cholera to Strood, though it is possible that the bacteria may have already been present in the River Medway, which could explain why many of those who died had occupations on the water. What is most evident, however, is that unlike the people of Lambeth, the residents of the Medway Towns were not drawing their drinking water as enthusiastically from the river. It is likely Esther contracted cholera elsewhere and brought it to Strood. It is impossible to know how this happened, but we can guess that she may have travelled out of Strood on business for Jacob, her husband, perhaps to deliver some shoes. Tracing her older children on the census poses other interesting hypotheses, and Esther’s son, John Calcroft Walker, born in 1807, could be the key to how cholera arrived in Strood. John was a shoemaker in Faversham married to Sarah. Sarah was possibly his second wife and in 1841 there were no children living with them. By 1851 John had re-married following the death of Sarah on 28<sup>th</sup> June 1849 - only eight days after Esther. Sarah’s death

certificate states that she died of a *stoppage of the bowels*, hardly the same as cholera, which is characterised by prolific diarrhoea. However, a symptom of cholera is paralysis of the bladder and acute dehydration, and the varying levels of severity of the disease also often caused cholera to be misdiagnosed. It should also be considered that in times of epidemic, the cause of death was sometimes deliberately incorrectly recorded in order not to cause widespread panic. Perhaps Esther visited her son and daughter-in-law in Faversham and was infected with cholera there, although Farr does not think that cholera arrived in Faversham until the July. Could it be that Esther took cholera to Faversham?

The spread of cholera was not in the first instance by people and by road, though cholera does depend on incubation in humans. The bacteria favours movement along estuarine waterways and would have been spread in a number of ways. First, by boats and ships. Effluent from ships' passengers infected with the disease could enter into the water in a number of ways, but most commonly by the emptying of bilges and the discharge of effluent and tainted materials overboard. The disease would have been spread from land to water to land again, by the discharge of infected sewage from those affected on the shores of rivers such as the Medway and Thames and the collection of drinking and washing water either from the river or by the river water mixing in some way with the drinking water supply.

By the beginning of July 1849 the temperature had not increased by a significant amount: crucial to the development of the virulent strain of cholera is the relationship between temperature and rainfall. As the month progressed, temperatures rose and rainfall fell, favouring the spread of the disease. By July, it had reached Crayford, Dartford, Farningham, Northfleet, Chalk, Shorne, Cobham, Wrotham, Hoo, Rochester, Gillingham, Faversham and Sheppey. By now it is evident that the disease was operating on a two-pronged approach, by land and by sea. Cholera spread inland at a rate of knots and with devastating results. In Rochester the fatalities at Fort Pitt were particularly bad and soldiers continued to die until 3<sup>rd</sup> October.

In Milton next Sittingbourne, the *Gazette* reported an initial outbreak of cholera in the Union Workhouse. The workhouse authorities decided to burn barrels of tar to try and ward the cholera off, but needless to say, this had not worked and around seven or eight were to die each day. The *Gazette* does not report the final death toll.

By 22 July the outbreak had intensified in Cliffe. Farr reported that a labourer's widow and her son had died, but the burial records record that Mary Mayor, the wife of Robert, and *two* of her sons died in close succession. In the 1841 census, the Mayors are living next door to Lance Simmons, born in 1799 and an ancestor of many FOMA members. Thankfully by the 1840s, he was past his child-bearing years, though his daughter Anne did not marry John Dunmall till 1855. The photograph is of Anne Simmons with two of her sons, Lancelot and Albert Dunmall. Anne would have been 20 in 1849 when cholera was raging in the Medway Towns and Cliffe.



*Anne Simmons with Lancelot and Albert Dunmall; with thanks to the Dunmall family and Heather Burnett.*

By August, cholera had spread to Bromley, Farnborough, St Mary Cray, North Cray., Foot's Cray, north Cray and St Paul's Cray, Eynsford, Horton, Hartley and Sheerness. Cholera had invaded the whole of Kent and was causing havoc in Canterbury and Dover. The *Gazette* recorded that in Strood on 7<sup>th</sup> August, three contracted cholera and died. They were buried at 8 o'clock in the evening of the same day, but their names are not recorded in the *Gazette*, neither is there a record for that date in the burial records of St Nicholas Church, though there are plenty of other entries for August from Strood Union.

The following week, on 14<sup>th</sup> August, the *Gazette* recorded several cases of cholera in Chatham, four of which were fatal, and one of which the illness only lasted a few hours, a sign that the disease had reached a high level of virulence. That same week there was another case in Strood, a hairdresser named Jordan, who cannot be located on the 1841 census. According to the *Gazette*, Jordan - a very healthy man - was attending his customers in the morning. At 10 am he started feeling unwell and he was dead by 10 that evening.

The disease spread to Strood Hill and a Cliffe family, the Wyatts. First Caroline, the wife, died and then Henry. Just seven years before Henry had been living in Cliffe working as an agricultural

labourer. He and his wife moved to Strood, but his son remained in Cliffe. The son became ill in church on a Sunday morning and was taken to the Parish Clerk's house in Cliffe; Wyatt Junior died at half past nine that same evening. His burial does not appear to have been recorded at Cliffe or Strood, and so his Christian name remains unknown.

On September 1 a Rachel Rowland died at Fair-field, and then the disease continued on Strood Hill, killing on 2<sup>nd</sup> September James Relph, aged 51, after just 12 hours, and then the following day his next door neighbour, Matthew Boorman, aged 55, also died after just 14 hours. The burial registers list many others who died in the area around the same time and some of these – if not all - are likely to be the other victims to whom William Farr refers in his report. It is interesting to note there is a *Mary* Jordan but no male Jordan listed in the St Nicholas Strood register in August, so perhaps the Strood hairdresser was buried elsewhere. However, it is highly likely that Mary was a relative.

It is clear that once cholera arrived in Strood it spread rapidly to others in the same area, no doubt as there was some contamination of the water supply by the effluent produced in the affected dwellings. But how had cholera arrived in the first place? I have mentioned the so-called Esther Perrin theory, and it is interesting that two of the victims we have mentioned have close connections to Gravesend. James Relph was a waterman who was born in Gravesend in 1796. Perhaps he had travelled by boat to a part of the estuary that was infected, or he had visited a relative in Gravesend. It is more likely he had been infected by Henry Wyatt who was evidently travelling back and forth to Cliffe and who perhaps brought cholera to Strood in July. In 1841 Henry was living in Cliffe in Cooling Street with his wife Catherine and children Joseph 4, Maria 15 and James 2. By 1851 Maria, or Mary, was working as a servant in Gravesend, a brother, Henry, not mentioned in the earlier census, was working as a servant in Frindsbury. James and John were now living with their widowed grandmother, Elizabeth Cox, on Broomhill in Strood.

By September, cholera raged in Stoke, Hoo, All Hallows and Hoo St Mary also suffered, but by the cooler autumn months of 1849, cholera was on the wane and the disease had retreated to Dartford, Gravesend and Northfleet. By 17 October only seven deaths were recorded that week in Lambeth, and the mean temperature was 46.7°F, below average for the time of year. The drop in temperature was most certainly a factor in the decline of cholera cases, and indeed other infectious diseases in the capital. By 26 October, *The Times* reported that the epidemic was at an end but that of a population in London of around two million, 14,538 had perished. In England, William Farr calculated that 53,293 deaths had been registered from cholera and 18,887 from diarrhoea: a total death toll of over 70,000 people.

## Betty's Postcards



*FOMA Membership Secretary, Betty Cole, has collected postcards for about 25 years, and to date she has hundreds in her collection, including at least 50 on a Dickens theme. In this issue Betty showcases her postcard of World War Two screen idol Leslie Howard.*

The postcards I have previously shown were from the early 1900s, the so-called Golden Age of Postcards which came to an end at the close of the First World War when the postage went from ½d to 1d. This doesn't seem too drastic until you realise that in today's terms it would mean our Second Class postage rising from 30p to 60p!

The postcard illustrated in this issue is from the 1940s when the cinema was in its heyday and film stars were the celebrities of the day. Although cinemas closed at the beginning of World War Two, once they opened again people flocked to see not only feature films but also the latest Pathé News. In times of hardship and danger the cinema provided comfort, glamour and escape, not to mention morale boosting propaganda films.

In the Medway Towns we had several fine cinemas which, for the price of a single ticket, offered two films, the news and sometimes a cartoon. In one local cinema an organist came up on a raised platform and the audience was invited to sing along. In the week leading up to Christmas 1940 the *Chatham, Rochester and Gillingham News* advertised films at the Majestic (Rochester), the Palace (Chatham), the Regent (Chatham) the Ritz (Chatham) the National (Chatham), the Embassy (Gillingham), the Plaza (Gillingham) and the Picture House (Chatham). Does anyone know where that last one was? (Forgive me inhabitants of Strood I know you had a cinema but it was not mentioned in the advertisements).

Twenty years ago I paid £1.50 for this postcard. No longer a popular theme with postcard collectors they are often on eBay at really low prices and nobody wants them. When I was a child in the 1940s and '50s, anyone could send away to the American studios and get them for nothing. The addresses were found in *Picturegoer* magazine, who also published their own series of cards, and this is one of them. I have chosen from my collection, Leslie Howard, one of the stars of the 1939 film *Gone With the Wind*. Although I never understood Scarlett's preference for the kind, honourable Ashley Wilkes over the devastatingly handsome swashbuckling Rhett Butler, I chose his picture because Leslie Howard himself became a victim of the war. In 1943 the DC-3 unarmed civilian airliner in which he was a passenger was shot down by a Junkers Ju 88C6 over the Bay of Biscay. He was one of 17 fatalities.



LESLIE HOWARD

GABRIEL PASCAL PHOTO



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

