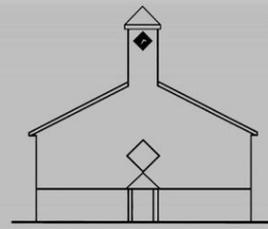


# The Clock Tower



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

Issue Number 03: Summer 2006



*'Pride of Rochester'; Short Sunderland III, Rochester Bridge and Castle Club by David Ellwood, GAvA. © David Ellwood.*

Well known artist and former Vice Chairman of the Guild of Aviation Artists, David Ellwood is well known in the Medway area and a keen supporter of the Friends of Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre. We are therefore delighted to feature one of his oil paintings on the front cover of this quarter's journal and to include an article about his work and background, *An Artist's View of Rochester's Great Legacy*.

In the previous issue of The Clock Tower, we featured articles on the Short Brothers by Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre librarian Norma Crowe, and on Kent and Medway aviation history by Brian Kingsley Smith, a Friends' Vice-President. This article was a transcript of Brian's talk at the Friends Inaugural General Meeting in April. We were fortunate at the meeting to see at first hand the two paintings by David Ellwood which Brian Kingsley Smith had commissioned and which are now on permanent display in Rochester's Castle Club.

## *About The Clock Tower*

*The Clock Tower* is the quarterly journal produced and published by the Friends of Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre.

### Editorial deadlines

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

**The copy deadline for Issue 04 of *The Clock Tower* is Monday 6<sup>th</sup> November 2006.**

### Publication date

The third Wednesday following the editorial deadline.

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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://ajthomas.com/theclocktower>

### **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 01634 332714; fax 01634 297060; email: [archives@medway.gov.uk](mailto:archives@medway.gov.uk).

General enquiries about the Friends can be obtained from the Secretary, Cindy O'Halloran, at the above address, or by telephoning 01634 332238/332714.

## *From the Chairman*

First of all I would like to thank everyone who is helping to make the Friends such a success. Our Committee is going from strength to strength and any initial teething problems are very quickly being sorted out. Yolande Dunn (see below) has been appointed Press Officer and has also agreed to handle publicity; I would like to thank her for doing such a great job.



Hopefully you will be reading the newsletter this time from the link on the Friends' new website [www.foma.btik.com](http://www.foma.btik.com). Please visit our site if you have not already done so! We are indebted to Tessa Towner, Friends Vice Chairman, for setting this up and for making it so eye-catching and interesting. As a result many of the items which we had to include in the newsletter are now on the website, leaving the newsletter free to include more discussion and articles on current historical research. I know that Amanda Thomas, our Editor, has been overwhelmed with articles and already we have a waiting list stretching into 2007. Having said that, if you have something to say, please do contact her. Our readership also continues to increase, with almost 3,000 hits on The Clock Tower site. In addition we have had our first Society membership (see below) and our first permanent overseas member, Mr Graham Holmes, who has contributed to this issue. The latest talk at the Archives Centre on 25<sup>th</sup> July by Dr. Andrew Hann on the Victorian County History Project was well attended; an update on the project is also included in this issue. I look forward to meeting you at forthcoming Friends' events.

Roy Murrant, Chairman.

## *Publicity News*

I would like to thank all those people who have given the Friends support by advertising us in their journals and through their various associations. We are currently looking for sponsorship for a variety of different proposals concerned with The Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre. If anyone is interested in helping, I would be grateful if they could contact Stephen Dixon, Borough Archivist, at Medway Archives Office, Civic Centre, Strood, Rochester, Kent ME2 4AU; telephone 01634 332714; fax 01634 297060; or email [stephen.dixon@medway.gov.uk](mailto:stephen.dixon@medway.gov.uk).



Finally, we are delighted that the Snodland Historical Society ([www.snodlandhistory.org.uk](http://www.snodlandhistory.org.uk)) has recently become our first *Society Member*. Their Chairman, Dr Andrew Ashbee, is a regular visitor to MALSC and he has published a great deal of useful material on Snodland.

Yolande Dunn, Press Officer.

## *The Committee*

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## *Archives Update*

Stephen Dixon, Borough Archivist

The period since the last newsletter has been the committee's most active period since the Friends were established.

The committee agreed to consider my proposal for the Friends to apply for grant funding to enable the listing of the Rochester City Archives. A sub-committee has been formed to prepare the bid in detail. If successful, the bid will fund the employment of a fixed term project archivist, probably over a two year period, and our largest unlisted collection will become fully available for research. It is hoped there will be opportunities for members of the Friends to assist in the project in the implementation stage. Much work remains to be done to prepare the bid before handing over to a project archivist, but we can look forward to a prestigious achievement for the Friends if the bid succeeds.

The Rochester City Archives include medieval charters, the city customal, assize records, rate books, account books, correspondence files, maps, plans and drawings, all capable of throwing light on the ancient city and its people over several centuries. We sometimes overlook the importance of our local government archives but they constitute the greater part of our stock and are the reason for our existence. The Darnley family (see April Lambourne's article), estate papers and the online parish registers project, *Medway Ancestors*, both benefited from grant funding. Perhaps now is the time to bring our foremost local government collection to the attention of the wider community. Letters of support are invited.

The events sub-committee has met for the first time and an exciting calendar of events has been proposed for 2007-2008. Further details will be published shortly.

Recent accessions have notably included the title deeds to Restoration House in Rochester. The deeds cover the period 1799-1989 and constitute our most important deposit for several years. Restoration House takes its name from the occasion King Charles II spent the eve of his coronation there. The house also achieved fame through inclusion in Charles Dickens' novel *Great Expectations*, in which it is called Satis House and serves as the home of Miss Havisham. The deeds will help illustrate the lives of real occupants. I would like to take the opportunity to thank Robert Tucker, proprietor of Restoration House, for his part in obtaining the deeds.

I have been interviewed for television programmes twice recently, firstly in connection with Jezreel's Tower, Gillingham, for *A Digital History of Britain* to be broadcast on BBC4 or BBC2 in February 2007 and secondly in connection with the *Textus Roffensis* for the series *Cathedral* to be broadcast on ITV1 this December. I am pleased the Studies Centre and its collections are to achieve a national audience but it remains to be seen how well the author comes across!

The Jezreel's Tower, which is also recollected in our first overseas member Graham Holmes' article, was built as the headquarters of the New and Latter House of Israel or Jezreelites by James Jershom Jezreel, alias James White, and his followers in 1885, though the sect and its tower were short-lived. A parade of shops forming part of the tower precincts, and similarly battlemented, still stands at the top of Canterbury Street, while the tower itself was demolished in 1961.

The *Textus Roffensis* (see Editor's Footnotes) is important because it contains the earliest record of the English language and the earliest surviving English laws. It constitutes the first evidence of the establishment of the English state and through the migration of the English speaking people it serves as the foundation stone of all other English speaking states like the USA and Commonwealth countries, and some non-English speaking states including Austria and Japan.

Our web site CityArk is currently undergoing an upgrade to ensure conformity with XML and Encoded Archival Description. Both of these will in turn enable interoperability with archives web portals being planned nationally into which CityArk can link. With the completion of these jobs, CityArk's technical specifications will have kept abreast of its status as the leading local government detailed piece-level database, imagebase and moviebase and the first to host parish registers online. In addition, further to my piece in the last issue, the CityArk MovieBase has been expanded and many exciting additions are yet planned.

My colleagues and I look forward to meeting you at our Friends' events or in the MALSC searchroom.

## *The Darnley Archive: Preservation and Promotion*

April Lambourne, Archives and Local Studies Officer.

*April Lambourne, Archives and Local Studies Officer at the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre (MALSC), has prepared the MALSC online exhibition of the Earls of Darnley of Cobham Hall. As an undertaking to the Heritage Lottery Fund, which funded the listing of the unlisted portion of the Cobham Hall collection several years ago, the exhibition features some of the most interesting documents associated with Cobham Hall (collection U565). The exhibition can be viewed at [www.medway.gov.uk/darnleyexhibition](http://www.medway.gov.uk/darnleyexhibition).*

The Darnley family archive is an extensive private collection held at the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre and housed in an archival strongroom where temperature and humidity is controlled to ensure the long-term welfare of the documents. The Earls of Darnley were resident at Cobham Hall from the early 18<sup>th</sup> century until the 1950s. John Bligh (1687 –1728) inherited Cobham Hall through his marriage to Theodosia Hyde and the family became large landowners in both Kent and Ireland. John Bligh was created Baron Clifton of Rathmore in 1721, Viscount of Darnley in 1723 and finally was awarded the Earldom of Darnley in 1725.

A wider project to restore Cobham Park following the building of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link, led to a collaborative venture by Cobham Ashenbank Management Scheme (CAMS) and Medway Council. A successful bid by CAMS to the Heritage Lottery Fund in 2003 enabled Medway Council to appoint a project archivist for 14 months to complete the listing of the collection. To celebrate the completion of the project towards the end of 2005, and also as part of the national Archives Awareness Campaign, MALSC staged an exhibition entitled *Beyond the Green Baize Door: social and domestic life at Cobham Hall over two centuries*. An associated event, a dramatised reading of letters from the Darnley archive, was also held on the run-up to Christmas 2005.

We were fortunate to appoint Nicola Waddington, formerly of Canterbury Cathedral Archives, to carry out the monumental task of completing the listing of the collection. The task had been started some decades before, but one third of the total collection remained unlisted. Nevertheless, the resulting list (for Part 2) is much larger than that of the original one third and amounts to over 3,000 records, many of those representing several individual items. Medway Archives' long-term objective is to re-list the original list and bring it up to the same standard as Nicola's list.

The project also involved the making of essential BS5454 packaging materials for which we are much indebted to Derek Moore, the Senior Archives Assistant, for his tireless contribution and to Nicola for ensuring the bundles of papers and volumes are securely packaged and labelled, resulting in this part of the Darnley collection being the best packaged collection in the strongroom.

The documents themselves are a fairly complete set of family and estate records and cover most of the period that the family were at Cobham Hall. They do also however include rough drafts of documents involved with the long court case that arose out of the inheritance of Cobham Hall, along with bills for work outstanding at the time of the death of Charles Duke of Lennox in 1672. There are very few manorial records. The actual date span of all the documents is 1537 – 2003.

The estate records cover most aspects of both farming the estate and managing its tenants. The family records of the collection are extremely varied and range from title deeds, which detail the family's entitlement to the lands that they hold, official and charity papers which record the family's official duties, through to the personal family papers which were written or collected privately by individual family members.

In some cases it was very difficult to separate the family from the estate. Some original files relate to both family and estate matters.

Certain specific topics of interest are associated with this family and the records highlight these to varying degrees. The 4th Earl is known for his building of the Darnley mausoleum on William's Hill within Cobham Park, for his remodelling of the gardens and parkland by Humphrey Repton and for his art collection of masterpieces. Ivo 8th Earl of Darnley was captain of the English cricket team during their tour of Australia in 1882/3. This tour followed the Ashes match at Lord's in August 1882. His wife, Florence 8th Countess of Darnley, was an avid collector of pressed flowers. Her diaries in particular contain many specimens. The family papers in general also give a good insight into the private and professional lives of an aristocratic family from the 18th to 20th centuries including personal relationships, finances, responsibilities and pastimes.

The Darnley exhibition took Medway Archives staff several months of research and preparation. Ten boards displayed photographs and extracts from documents ranging from letters, accounts, log books, estate records to memorabilia all reflecting the lives of the Bligh family members, the management of the estate and its tenants, servants and estate workers, leisure and pastimes and highlighting the importance of cricket at Cobham Hall. Whilst the employee records in the collection are incomplete, several family historians subsequently found information on their ancestors who worked as servants in the hall or as workers on the estate.

The exhibition moved on to Cobham Hall, now a private school for girls, for the summer season during which time it has been open to the public. From autumn 2006 it is scheduled for other venues, starting with the Visitors' Centre in Rochester High Street. MALSC staff have also created an online version of some of the material displayed and this can be viewed at [www.medway.gov.uk/darnleyexhibition](http://www.medway.gov.uk/darnleyexhibition).

MALSC also commissioned a professional writer and dramatist, Julie Garton, to write a script based on original correspondence in the collection. The result was two pieces entitled *Little Lord Clifton* and *Bowled Over* which were performed at the Studies Centre by Norma Crowe, the Local Studies Librarian, and Jean Lear, also from MALSC, ably accompanied by Chris Bull of Kent Libraries. Julie did an excellent job of remaining faithful to the original correspondence and weaving it into an entertaining narrative that brought the characters to life. The performance proved so popular that we were invited by the Friends of Cobham Hall Trust to repeat it at Cobham Hall itself in July this year. History brought to life by the archives.



Above: Taken from the MALSC online exhibition of the Earls of Darnley of Cobham Hall ([www.medway.gov.uk/darnleyexhibition](http://www.medway.gov.uk/darnleyexhibition)):

*Rochester Pageant, June 1931. Postcard photograph of Esme Ivo Bligh, 9th Earl of Darnley, in the part of Robert Devereux, Lord Leicester and his wife, Lady Nancy Darnley, in the part of Queen Elizabeth I, both in period costume, set in Rochester Castle gardens or inner bailey. From a scene in episode 6, the visit of Queen Elizabeth I to Richard Watts of Satis House, Boley Hill, Rochester in 1573. Couchman Collection [DE402\_8\_p.16(U)].*

## *Strood Heritage Society*

Norma Crowe, Local Studies Librarian.

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

It has been said that Strood is the poor relation in the family of towns, which form Medway. In terms of written sources and photographic records held in the local studies collections here at the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre this is undeniably the case.



*Left: From the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre Couchman Collection, ref DE402/11/77(L). Strood High Street (east side) from Station Road; 1906.*

In 1998 the Local Studies Team resolved to start to redress the balance by collecting memorabilia and recorded reminiscences of Strood in living memory. A three month long project, during which reminiscences were recorded and memorabilia was collected, generated a pleasing amount of interest. These new sources would be used alongside existing collections to mount an exhibition on Strood High Street towards the end of that year.

To launch the exhibition we invited local historian Barbara Marchant to give a talk on Strood, its history and notable residents. At the end of her talk she invited sympathetic listeners to join her in setting up a group to promote the history and interests of the people of Strood.

The first meeting of the group was held here at the Studies Centre on 10<sup>th</sup> March 1999 which 17 people attended. Reading the minutes of that meeting it seems that we intended to publish a book on Strood, to update Henry Smetham's history, written in 1899. We have not achieved that goal yet!

The group decided to call itself the Strood Heritage Society. The objects of the Society are:

- To promote interest in the history of Strood, particularly its buildings past, present and future, as well as the social life of the area.
- To support conservation of features likely to shape Strood's heritage.
- To create public awareness of the importance of preserving printed and photographic records, and to encourage the deposit of such material at Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre.

Meetings are normally held at 7.30pm in the Peninsula Methodist Church Hall, Cliffe Road Strood, on the fourth Monday in the month. Topics of interest to Strood residents are of course on the agenda, and there is usually a slot for a guest speaker.

The next meeting is scheduled for 25th September 2006, and the talk by Anne Carter is entitled *Napoleon – The Man*. New members are warmly welcomed. For further information please contact the Chairman David Goodwin on 01634 717185.

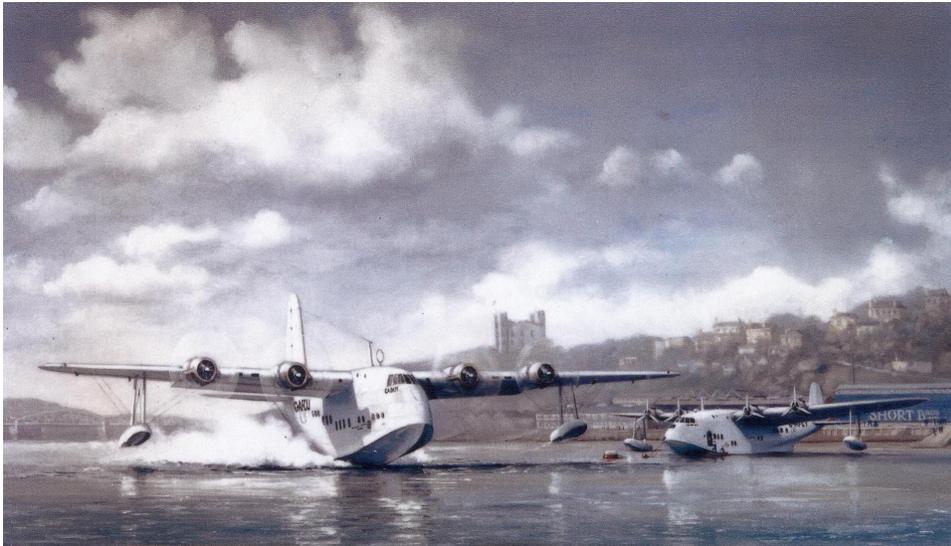
## *An Artist's View of Rochester's Great Legacy*

David Ellwood, GAvA

*Cheltenham based artist David Ellwood, whose painting is featured on this issue's front cover, explains his connection with the Medway Towns and his love of aviation.*

Although I know very little about the Medway area geographically, an affectionate bond has evolved as a result of experiences in my earliest years as an employee and, much, much later through my interest in aviation art.

Mine is an outsider's attachment to the craftsmen of Rochester with whom I worked, and a love of the great and historic Short aircraft which I have endeavoured to record through painting oils, my preferred medium. I subscribe to the era of traditional perspective and representational art rather than the current vogue of shock techniques and distortions pretending to herald progress. While it must be acknowledged that paintings of historic aircraft have some dependence on the interpretation of photographs, these come mainly from the black and white era and do not inhibit the artist's freedom to harmonise good technical representation of the aircraft with their interpretation of colour and choice of atmospheric settings.



*'Medway Scene 1940';  
Short S.30 Empire and  
2.6 G Class. ©David  
Ellwood.*

In 1941, I commenced an apprenticeship with Short Brothers at a satellite factory near my birthplace of Swindon, building Short Stirlings. I worked with a number of Rochester-bred skilled metalworkers and apprentices who, quite rightly, were bursting with pride over *their* company's achievements at the Seaplane Works at Rochester Airport. I sub-consciously absorbed this enthusiasm and, as a fellow apprentice, found myself sharing it. Such indoctrination was further enhanced when the company moved me on to the harsher experience of outstation work on Sunderlands in service on the Cromarty Firth. Later, on completion of my apprenticeship, I entered the RAF to serve on these much-loved craft at Seletar, Singapore.

As I got older, I turned my interests towards art and painted in oils many of the aircraft of which I had gained experience and affection, in particular the historic flying boats of Short Brothers which, to this day, command so much nostalgic interest. Through membership of the respected

Guild of Aviation Artists, from which I recently stepped down as Vice Chairman, I gained a reputation for specialising in this genre.

Then, earlier this year, thanks to the happy circumstance of meeting Friends' Vice President Brian Kingsley Smith, I returned to Rochester after an interval of sixty years with the expectation of seeing reminders of this truly great heritage of which the city should be bursting with pride. Gone were the Seaplane Works and even a hint that this source of so much skill, innovation and craftsmanship ever existed. It is comforting to learn that the Short Brothers' Commemoration Society [see Issue 02] has been formed with the resolve to address this omission with a permanent memorial on the Esplanade. I do most sincerely hope they are successful.

The last operational Sunderland was hauled from the water at Seletar, Singapore, on 20<sup>th</sup> May 1959 with much ceremony by 205/209 Squadron. The engine and equipment were removed and the hull sold as scrap. Fortunately the RAF museums at Hendon and Duxford have Sunderland examples, and Florida's Fantasy of Flight has the last remaining flying example, albeit a modified version. At Rochester Airport, the grass runway used by Stirlings still exists, but nowhere in the world is there a single example of this mighty aircraft which had the distinction of being Britain's first four engined bomber. There is, however, a society called The Stirling Project which is endeavouring to reconstruct one from salvaged items and original drawings.

I am so pleased to share with the remaining ex-Shorts' employees resident in the Medway Towns (though I am only still in touch with Leslie Dickson) the pride we feel in having played a part in that great evolutionary period of aviation development. Then the Medway Towns showed the world how to design and build aircraft capable of crossing the Atlantic and of exploring, opening and servicing the routes to South Africa and the Far East.

I know from the many requests for my own modest portrayals of Shorts aircraft and their popularity for calendars and postcards that there exists across the country and even the world a desire to keep alive our memories of these machines and aviators, and the achievement of the Short brothers, their designers and craftsman. They have a proud history!



*Above: 'Birth of the Heavies'; Short Stirling Mk III over Rochester. © David Ellwood.*

## *Jewish Life in the Medway Towns*

Irina Shrub, Local Studies Librarian.

*To coincide with MALSC's free exhibition, The Jewish Presence in Medway\*, and the talk, Jews in Britain: Should Immigrants Integrate in the Society?\*\*, Irina Shrub, Medway Archives and Local Studies Librarian gives a background to Jewish life in Medway.*

There is no evidence of Jewish communities prior to the Norman Conquest. With William the Conqueror, Jewish merchants and artisans from France, particularly Rouen, were encouraged to move to England in the hope that their commercial skills, expertise and personal capital would make England more prosperous. Jews established communities in the large cities such as London, York, Bristol and Canterbury.

*Encyclopaedia Judaica* contains references to Jews in Rochester from 1187 onwards. The earliest note was a plea to the Lord of Rochester Castle for shelter; as a result, Jewish families were then allowed to live for some months in the outer parts of the castle. By 1231 a small Jewish community appears to have resided in the City, though no Jewish records survive from that period. In 1290 Jews were expelled from England and there would be no other person professing to be a Jew in the Kingdom for 400 years until the time of Oliver Cromwell. Between the readmission to England in 1655, and 1690, about 300 Jews had settled in London.

Chatham had particular attractions as a naval dockyard for Jewish immigrants, especially as the conditions for survival in London were harsh. Jews were excluded from the Freedom of the City of London (and the retail trade in the City of London therefore) until 1831, from practising at the Bar until 1833, from participating in local government until 1845, from commissioned rank in the forces until 1846, from membership of Parliament until 1858 and from Oxford and Cambridge Universities until 1871. In contrast to London practice, one of the members of the original synagogue, a certain Israel LEVI, became a Freeman of the City of Rochester in 1788.

Therefore Chatham acquired a sizeable community of Jewish slop-sellers – traders in old clothes and bedding - who later became Navy agents, jewellers, opticians and shop-keepers. The district of Chatham Intra on the boundary between Chatham and Rochester and continuing to Chatham High Street was once heavily settled by the Jews and strongly associated with Jewish businesses (as late as the mid-twentieth century), possibly because of the proximity of the synagogue - Jewish religious services are conducted on the Sabbath, the day when Jews are not allowed to use transport of any kind - so in order to comply they settled close to the place of worship. The origin of an organised Jewish community in Chatham is not recorded at that time. It is probable, that until the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Jews held their services at each others' houses, with no single site recognised as a permanent synagogue.

There exists an interesting record of a Jewish wedding conducted in Chatham by an itinerant Rabbi ASH of Dover in April or May 1777. The only information available from this entry is the name of the bridegroom, Judah. It is quite odd that the writer did not include the bride's name. It is notable that although the Jewish congregation, was already in possession of a place of worship, it still lacked a resident minister. Consequently, some festivals and rituals were performed by visiting officiates.

There is a copy of a licence, dated 6 January 1787, from St. Bartholomew's Hospital to the same Levi ISRAEL of Chatham, silversmith, and his associates, whose names were as follows: Solomon MORDECHAI of Rochester, silversmith; Israel Levi of Rochester, chapman; Humphrey SOLOMON of Rochester, salesman; Isaac ABRAHAM of St. Margaret's, Rochester, tobacconist; Hart COHAN of Chatham, salesman; Michael ABRAHAM of Chatham, salesman; Abraham MOSES of Chatham, salesman. This document contains for the first time an explicit record of the leading members of the Jewish community in Chatham and Rochester acting together.

There are records of Jews serving in the Royal Navy. At least two Jews from Chatham, Richard BARNETT and Isaac SAMUEL, served as landsmen in the Navy during the Napoleonic Wars. However every Jew serving in the Royal Navy hid his religion, knowing he would be treated with a mixture of "contempt, suspicion and aversion" if he did not (Green, Geoffrey L. *The Royal Navy and Anglo-Jewry 1740-1820*).

The first extant record of the synagogue itself ("Mr. Isaacs' place at Garden Street Brompton") mentions the marriage on 6 June 1838, between Samuel MAGNUS of Dover and Miriam ISAACS of Brompton, solemnised by the first resident minister - Rabbi Jehiel PHILLIPS.

By 1848 there were about 60 Jewish families living in Chatham and its neighbourhood, and from about this time there is evidence of the extensive participation of Jews in Medway's political, cultural and social life. Families of particular note are MAGNUS, LEVY, PYKE, ISAAC, BARNARD and COLEMAN.

The first recorded mention of the "Cottages Jews' Tabernacle Synagogue" in Chatham is dated 1770. A certain John ROBERTS, a tenant of St. Bartholomew's Hospital, Rochester, sublet one of his tenements to Jews. This evidence is significant for two reasons – as a proof of a specific date, and as an administrative record of the existence of the Jewish congregation and synagogue in Chatham. A lease book among the records of St. Bartholomew Hospital also gives us a history of the premises prior to 1766. These were formerly occupied by William SCOLCOP and Widow WILSON and later by John TYLGHMAN and William HARRIS. Names such as HARRIS and WILSON can be either Jewish or Gentile so we are unable to precisely establish when Jews acquired these tenements. A further document, an estate book covering the period 1627-1822, gives the earliest named evidence of Jewish sub-tenants, "August 14 1780...let to Levi ISRAEL and others, etc." By 1780, and as documented in the lease book for 1767-1803, one of the tenements was described being "lately rebuilt, and is now used as a Jew synagogue".

In 1867 Simon MAGNUS, silversmith and pawnbroker of Chatham, acquired the freehold of the "Cottages Jews' Tabernacle Synagogue" messuages with burial ground attached to build a Synagogue and a Minister's House in commemoration of his son, Lazarus MAGNUS, who tragically died on 7 January 1865, aged 39.<sup>3</sup> The foundation stone of the synagogue was laid on 5 October 1868 and the structure was consecrated on 17 June 1870 by the Rev. Dr. ADLER, Chief Rabbi of the Jewish Community in Great Britain.

Right: Original drawing by HH Collins of the front elevation plans for the Minister's House (left) and the Synagogue.



A prominent London based Jewish architect and surveyor H.H. COLLINS designed the synagogue, the builder was J.G. NAYLAR of Rochester; and the stained glass, including representation of Ten Commandments (see detail) was from Messrs SMITH and MIERS, London. The costs reached £5500 - today the equivalent of more than £250,000.



The Chatham Observer of 14 January 1882 in the series Local Clerical Sketches stated, “...splendid Synagogue and minister’s residence. Few houses of worship can equal it in architectural beauty, and fewer still can excel it.”

To the east of the new Synagogue and facing the High Street, a new three storey house, the Rabbi’s residence, was built from the same stone as the synagogue; sadly was demolished around 1970, but made way for a much needed classroom and community Centenary Hall.



The original décor of the synagogue was recently restored (see photograph) with the generous help of a member of the community and the Medway Council and English Heritage at a total cost of £110,000. Then on Sunday 26 January 2003, the eve of Holocaust Memorial Day, a new stained glass window was unveiled in the Synagogue. Originally designed by Mr. HALPERN, architect, the design was developed by Sharif AMIN who created the window and crafted the stained glass. The 24ft-long window is positioned in the roof of the Synagogue and features the names of 22 of the Nazi death camps.

There is no record of the presence of a resident minister in Medway until 1838, however, a marriage entry dated 6 June 1838 states that the ceremony was performed by Rabbi Jehiel PHILLIPS, who was residing, according to the 1841 census,

on the premises of the synagogue, which makes us suppose that he lived there in 1838 too. From the few available records we know that he came from Poland with his wife Rosa and two children, twins Jane and David, between 1826 and 1837. In December 1846 he solemnised the marriage of his daughter Jane to Barnett LYONS, a pawnbroker from Glamorganshire, and it seems that over a period of time the family moved there as well. The PHILLIPS still lived in Rochester in 1851 by which time they have had three more children, Esther, Jess and Lewis, but they disappear from the synagogue records after 1853. Jehiel's death certificate of 1870 was registered in Glamorgan.

At about the time of the PHILLIPS family relocation to Wales, a new name appeared in the synagogue records – that of Lazarus POLACK, who became the first minister of the Chatham Memorial Synagogue. Born in 1813 in Hamburg under Napoleon's rule, he came to England at the beginning of 1850s and settled in Rochester, where in 1854 he married Mindela BERLIN – a daughter of Isaac BERLIN, the Reader of the Synagogue.

Other ministers included Bernard J. SALOMONS, c.1890, Moses ISAACS c. 1898, M. FENTON c.1903, Joseph BABITY c. 1920, Abraham SAMET c.1920s and Rev. S. WOLFE 1929-1942, who organised an evening Jewish school for children, which operated twice a week. Rev. S. Wolfe was the last minister of the synagogue.

Today there is no resident minister, but the community is fortunate to have several lay readers, who officiate at the services together with an occasional visit from the Minister for Small Communities, the Rev. Malcolm WEISMAN, O.B.E.

Since the former congregations of Gravesend, Canterbury and Sheerness ceased to exist, the Chatham Synagogue has become the only one in Mid-Kent. It draws its members from this large area, although the majority live in Medway and Maidstone. Today members of this independent Orthodox Jewish community continue to play an active part in local life, being judges, doctors, school governors and teachers. They also take part in the local Racial Equality Council and Advisory Council for Religious Education, amongst other activities. The Synagogue hosts Inter-Faith meetings, and receives school groups from throughout Kent and the outskirts of London, in accordance with current religious education curriculae, and carries out teachers' training to this end.

*A full transcript of this article, including a bibliography, may be obtained by contacting the Editor.*

\* *The Jewish Presence in Medway*, exhibition, Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre, 7<sup>th</sup> September to 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2006; admission free.

\*\* *Jews in Britain - Should Immigrants Integrate within the Community?* talk by Gabriel Lancaster of Chatham Memorial Synagogue. Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre, 12<sup>th</sup> September 2006, 7.30 pm. Tickets £3; advanced booking available on 01634-332714.

## *Friends Overseas*

*In July, the Friends received the first application for permanent overseas membership from Graham Holmes in New Zealand. To celebrate this landmark, Clock Tower Editor, Amanda Thomas, invited Graham to talk about why he decided to join.*

“I joined the Friends because it looked like an interesting organisation. Although I have been in New Zealand for almost 40 years, I still feel a strong affinity to Medway, where I was born. My main history interest is genealogy, having ancestors who worked in Chatham Dockyard and who went to sea in the Royal Navy. My maternal relations are members of the SHILLETOS and CLIFT families of Chatham and Brompton and my paternal relations the HOLMES and SMITH families of Gillingham.

I was born in Gillingham in 1948 and attended Byron Road Primary School and Gillingham Grammar. I worked for a few years for Wimpeys Construction on the Sappers Barracks Modernisation and at the Hoo Refinery but then emigrated to New Zealand in 1967 with my young wife whose family had already moved here. We live in a small ‘timber town’ called Tokoroa where I have worked at the local paper mill for over 30 years. We enjoy a very rural life, vastly different to what I probably would have lived had I settled in Medway with my family.

I still have a mother and two brothers in Medway and a brother in Portsmouth so I have often revisited, spending many days walking all around Medway familiarising myself with the old place. Some of the changes over the years have been amazing and at times disturbing. I remember Chatham before the Pentagon Shopping Centre, the M2 being built and the Jezreel’s Tower coming down. I lived just a hundred yards away and used to play there. We went mushrooming on the Lines and used to hang around the old forts. I was sorry to see a lot of the woods disappearing around the Darland Banks and Hempstead - the price of progress. I did love the Dockyard Museum, however, and will certainly go back the next time we are over.”

## *The Victoria County History at MALSC*

Dr Andrew Hann, Committee Member

*Dr Andrew Hann was appointed Kent Team Leader for the Victoria County History's England's Past For Everyone (EPE) programme in September 2005. Employed by the University of Greenwich, Andrew is based in the Medway area and is a Member of the Friends of Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre.*

*Dr Hann reports on the latest developments with an account of the formal launch of England's Past for Everyone (People and Work in the Lower Medway Valley 1750 – 1900)*

Almost a year since its inception, the *Victoria County History's England's Past for Everyone* (EPE) programme has made considerable advances across the country. Specifically in Kent, the project has now reached an important milestone with the production of the first draft text. A team of around fifty volunteers has been recruited who are hard at work at the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre (MALSC). Survey work has also commenced with a study of the village of Eccles completed in late July 2006.

To mark this progress and to celebrate the involvement of Eccles' local community in the project, a launch event was held on Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> July in the fitting surroundings of the Ward Room of the University of Greenwich's Maritime Chatham campus. On a very hot summer's evening over a hundred people gathered to listen to presentations and meet others involved in the project; many of those attending were EPE volunteers and their families. Also present were members of local history societies from the Medway area, including Councillor Sue Haydock of Medway Council (Vice-President of the Friends of Medway Archives), MALSC representatives, the Centre for Kentish Studies, and several members of the EPE support team from London.

To start off the evening, Jane Longmore, Head of the University of Greenwich School of Humanities, welcomed everyone and underlined the University's continued support for the EPE project, and for the revival of the *Victoria County History* (VCH) in Kent in the longer term. The VCH was represented by its General Editor, Alan Thacker, who gave an outline of the EPE programme, explaining the reasons why it had been developed, including the benefits it was expected to bring for the VCH and the wider community of local historians. He explained that whereas VCH has in the past relied primarily on the efforts of directly employed county staff, the new EPE model would see a growing engagement with local historians and the wider community. Stuart Bligh also said a few words on behalf of Kent County Council's Archive Services.

He particularly commented on the recruitment and involvement of so many volunteers, something that the Centre for Kentish Studies has struggled with in the past. The main presentation of the evening was given by myself, looking at different aspects of our research, but focusing particularly on the work undertaken by volunteers. Some early findings relating to wages and working conditions were also presented.

Once formal proceedings were completed, guests were free to mingle, ask informal questions and sample the drinks and refreshments laid on by the University's catering staff. Many also took the opportunity to peruse the poster displays, some of which showcased volunteer work, whilst others provided an introduction to some of the main project themes; extracts from the successful volunteer newsletter were also on display.

Thanks must go out to all the volunteers for their continued support of the project and without whom the ambitious programme of work would be impossible. The success of the evening was also thanks to Alison Cresswell, who did much of the organising behind the scenes, the University of Greenwich for hosting the event, and to all the speakers. It is hoped we will be able to gather again in a couple of year's time to celebrate the launch of the Kent paperback volume.



*At the launch.*

*From left to right: John Vigar, architectural consultant, Dr Andrew Hann, Dean Jones England's Past for Everyone volunteer.*

## *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.*

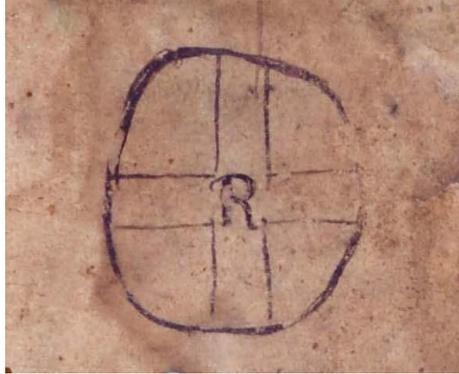


A summer holiday is an opportunity to relax and get away from it all. Unless you are an historian, of course. I find it extremely difficult to go anywhere and not become interested in the history of the place I am visiting. Such was my experience recently in Barbados, but it was not at all as I had expected.

The BBC's family history programme *Who Do You Think You Are?* delved into the genealogical mysteries of many celebrities, including the BBC's first black newsreader Moira Stuart. The programme culminated with the unexpected possibility that her maternal grandmother, Clara Christian, was descended from Antiguan slaves and the white plantation owning Christian family. There is no doubt that *Who Do you Think You Are?* has encouraged many, many people to explore their own family history, and perhaps one of the benefits of this has been the breaking down of taboos and the open discussion of uncomfortable family secrets such as illegitimacy or mixed race parentage.

My initial experience of Barbadian history was a walking trip around the capital, Bridgetown. I was amazed at the similarities between some of the old Georgian warehouse buildings and those at Chatham Dockyard. Not only that but the main town square, National Heroes Square, is dominated by a bronze statue of Nelson, erected in 1813, which predates our own in London by about 26 years. Then there were old red telephone and post boxes, even the layout of the fields and hedgerows – *and* the Barbadians drive on the left hand side of the road. Yet the pain of the more unpleasant elements of the island's colonial history still lingers, as in Bridgetown Nelson has been turned around so that his back now faces the square and soon his statue will be moved elsewhere.

In the two weeks we spent on the island, we were enchanted by the local people, but I suppose I should not have been surprised that few of them wanted to talk about the past and their origins. Guide books and some of the historical titles available in local shops were useful in providing an outline of the island's past. The first African slaves arrived on a British ship in 1627, though for many years the prime source of labour were English, Scottish and European indentured servants. I also found a reproduction of the historian Richard Ligon's map from the 1650s in PF Campbell's *An Outline of Barbados History*. The map lists the names of plantation owners of the time, including the KNOTT family, a name in my own tree. However, not all was lost, as over a drink one evening in our hotel, we started chatting to a family who came from Sittingbourne. And, *yes*, though the connection was vague, we concluded that *we probably were related*.



*Above: A detail from The Textus Roffensis, 12th - 14th Centuries, from the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre online imagebase, ref.: drc rl 235v.*

*The Textus Roffensis is more properly two distinct books, though written at about the same time, and largely by the same scribe, which were only bound together some time after 1300. The first part contains one of the most important of all surviving collections of Anglo-Saxon laws, from the conversion of King Aethelberht of Kent to the coronation charter of King Henry I of 1100.*

*From the Archives...*



Some photographs and illustrations held at the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre remain unidentified. If you know where this photograph was taken and if you have a story to tell about the location, please contact the Editor, Amanda Thomas.