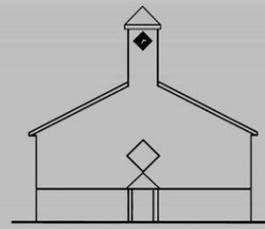


The Clock Tower



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

Issue Number 04: Christmas 2006



From the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre Couchman Collection; ref. DE402/7/35(U); 5 3/8" x 3 3/8" (136mm x 87mm) Before 1939. Photograph of Rochester Castle gardens under snow, looking south across lawn area towards north face of castle keep, showing trees in middle ground and left and right distance.

The Friends of Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre wish you a very happy Christmas and a prosperous New Year

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 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 05 of *The Clock Tower* is Monday 5th February 2007.

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: malsc@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

What a busy year this has been for the Friends, and a successful one too. It is hard to believe the number of talks and exhibitions we have had, and now we are on our fourth issue of *The Clock Tower*.



In October my position as Chairman was tested when I had to step in to the breach and give an unexpected talk on local pubs. It is inevitable that in an organisation like ours events can sometimes be cancelled, and I was pleased to be able to help. However, had I not been available I am sure that someone else on the Committee would have done the same - it is marvellous to have so much expertise to call on.

I look forward to meeting you at forthcoming Friends' events and wish you all a very merry Christmas and a happy and prosperous New Year.

Roy Murrant, Chairman.

P.S. Many organisations launch a Christmas appeal at this time of year – our is of a rather different nature! Please take the time to respond to April Lambourne's urgent request to help in devising possible 'Frequently Asked Questions' for the Medway Council web site.

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.

I do hope that as many members as possible will come to our pre-Christmas quiz: **Wine and Wisdom**. This will be held in the Civic Suite, Civic Centre, Strood, on Wednesday 13th December from 7.00 pm to 10pm. Tickets are £4.00 for members, £5.00 for non-members, and are available from the FOMA Secretary, Cindy O'Halloran at MALSC on 01634 332714 or at cindy.ohalloran@medway.gov.uk. Food will be provided, but please bring your own drinks!



We are still 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.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Yolande Dunn, Press Officer.

STOP PRESS: The annual Mince Pie Day will be held at the Study Centre on Wednesday 6th December, 10.00 am to 12 noon, followed by Pat Salter's talk on Edwin Harris. Numbers are limited, so please contact Cindy O'Halloran at MALSC on 01634 332714 or at cindy.ohalloran@medway.gov.uk to guarantee a place.

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Archives Update

Stephen Dixon, Borough Archivist



Staff and customers alike were sad to say farewell to Derek Moore, Senior Archives and Local Studies Assistant (SALSA), who retired on 29th September. Derek had been with us for 9 ½ years and was the mainstay of our public service. Originally from a skilled engineering background, Derek turned his hand to many of our conservation needs, packaging archives to high standards normally only associated with specialist manufacturers. Many of the charters of Rochester Cathedral have been reboxed using techniques developed by Derek and many expert visitors have admired his work. New equipment and materials were obtained to ensure his skills did not go unused. The money was well spent. A major contribution made by Derek in recent years was the tedious and lengthy upload of the images forming the *Medway Ancestors* imagebase. Derek probably bore the heaviest burden of this work and a worldwide virtual community of CityArk users owe him a great debt.



Derek was born in Madras, India, in 1942 and witnessed the bombing of the city by a lone Japanese woman pilot. We have all enjoyed his reminiscences of India and his boyhood days and hope we can look forward to his memoirs! Many Friends members and staff from MALSC attended Derek's leaving party (Derek is on the far right, above) which was held here at the Archives.

Cindy O'Halloran has stepped into the breach as Acting SALSA and at the time of writing (October 2006) a secondment is being sought for the post of Archives Assistant. The restructuring of the services with which we are brigaded has also seen the appointment of Lyn Rainbow, formerly Library Development Manager, as overall manager of the council's libraries and the studies centre.

The Rochester City Archives project continues to be a necessary preoccupation and subsequent to the committee's agreement to back the project, the necessary preparations have begun. I hope to be able to report on further progress before too long. Our working title for the project is *Archives of Great Expectations*.

We have received several interesting deposits recently. These include the following: records of the Rimington family and title deeds to premises in Jenkins' Dale, Chatham and Great Delce, Rochester, and letters from Arthur M. Burns of Richmond Hill, Ontario, Canada 1884 and Frances (Fannie) Ann Syms (and Henry (Harry) Gordon Syms) successively of Harlesden, Middlesex, Rossendale, Manitoba, Canada and Treherne, Manitoba, Canada to her brothers Arthur Verrier Rimington and Charles William Rimington, discussing family matters and climate and farming in Canada, 1887-1911 and 1934; overall covering dates 1801-1933 (DE1083)

Also added to our collections is a MS book of sermons or discourses composed and preached by John Lee alias Warner (lived c.1605-1679), subdean of Rochester c.1673-c.1676, archdeacon of Rochester 1660-79, rector of Southfleet 1652-79, rector of Bishopsbourne 1662-79, rector of Barham 1662-79 and rector of Milton next Gravesend 1642-53, preached and delivered at Bishopsbourne Church and Southfleet Church and possibly at Rochester Cathedral and his other parishes, c.1654-c.1663. At least two sermons criticise the Commonwealth government, several sermons criticise papists, at least one sermon criticises separatists and other sermons admonish his congregation for not saying Amen audibly or loudly and sitting or leaning lazily rather than kneeling during prayers (DRc (additional) (DE1086)) c.1654-c.1663

Finally, we have received records relating to former HM Cordite Factory at Cliffe (adjacent to the well-known nitro-glycerine factory of Messrs. Curtis and Harvey Ltd.), comprising duplicate rental agreements between Messrs. Curtis and Harvey Ltd., 110 Cannon Street, London, landlord and John Robertson of Manor Farm, Cliffe, farmer and tenant, in respect of four pieces of marshland of 71 ½ acres, with site plans 5 July 1921, sale particulars for 234 acres formerly known as HM Cordite Factory in Cliffe, with site plan and key to buildings, 1923 and report and valuation on same site by Messrs. Henry Butcher and Co., 63 and 64 Chancery Lane, London WC2, auctioneers, valuers and surveyors, for Messrs. Mellows and Sons, 45 Priestgate, Peterborough, in respect of an application by H.M. Thomas for a mortgage, with site plan, 1923; overall dates 1921-1924.

Medway MovieBase

Feedback has already proved the value of this addition to our online sources. It is especially pleasing to see glimpses of Chatham Navy Days in 1960, Winget's factory in Strood in the late 1960s, Chatham street scenes, royal visits to the Medway Towns, the Brook Pumping Station, Chatham, TS Arethusa and much more besides. I am particularly grateful to Tony Blake of Whitstable for supplying numerous clips from his own collection to enhance our suite of Medway films.

Moving images have significant educational potential and constitute a valid documentary source in their own right. However, I am anxious they are seen in the context of their parent collections which are mainly written and that they are also used alongside other written and printed source material including maps. A future challenge for all custodians of both written and audio-visual material is to ensure our wider audience is capable of navigating, corroborating and comparing all potential sources. It is likely the Medway MovieBase will be added to in the next few months with further glimpses of Medway area life, this time focusing on rural communities. Negotiations are in hand to this end. The Medway MovieBase is available via the set-up page of CityArk, www.cityark.medway.gov.uk/

We at Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre look forward to meeting you at our Friends' events or in the MALSC searchroom and wish you a happy Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

Local Studies Photographic Collection Digitisation Project

April Lambourne, Archives and Local Studies Officer.

The Local Studies photographic collection consists of approximately 15,000 images of the Medway area, including some unique images in special collections including Shorts Brothers, Chatham Dockyard, the Women in Medway project, aerial photographs etc. Many of the images included in *The Clock Tower* come from the collection, including the mystery photographs featured on the back cover.

In order to make these images accessible to a wider audience, Local Studies staff working with the Medway web development team have developed a prototype database of a selection of images from the collection. The aim has been to make searching of these images as easy as possible.

Medway Images (www.medway.gov.uk/medwayimages) has been developed as a test database and is available on the web. It includes 100 photographs of Chatham and is searchable by keywords such as street name, building or event. The results are presented as thumbnail pictures in date order and the user can click on an image to see an enlarged version together with a description of the image and details of holdings, copyright holder etc. Additional keywords have been added by staff during the cataloguing process which means specific features such as bicycles, trams, shops etc can be usefully searched. There is a Search Help facility and also useful links including one to the Couchman collection on the CityArk Imagebase.

Currently, Medway Council does not have sufficient funds to get the project under way. With the support of some local societies, to which we are most grateful, MALSC has applied for funding to the Heritage Lottery Fund to enable us to appoint a project officer for approximately 12 months to undertake the huge task of identification, copyright checking, dating, cataloguing and scanning the images in the Local Studies collections. For those images that cannot be included for copyright reasons, descriptive entries could still be added to the database to act as a catalogue of our holdings. It is also hoped that volunteers with good local knowledge will assist in some of the identification and dating.

The outcome of the bid will not be known until the beginning of next year. Meanwhile we welcome any comments and suggestions on the prototype database and its future development - please e-mail either april.lambourne@medway.gov.uk or norma.crowe@medway.gov.uk

A Christmas Appeal: MALSC Frequently Asked Questions

April Lambourne, Archives and Local Studies Officer.

This is an appeal to all members of the Friends of Medway Archives for some help in devising possible Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for the Medway Council web site.

All local authority web sites have an FAQ facility which allows users to type in a question about council services and the search engine will present web pages on the site that give information that may help answer the question. For example: "What are the opening times of Archives?" The system works by matching web pages on the site with the keywords within the question.

MALSC now has responsibility for ensuring that its FAQs are up-to-date and we feel that ours could do with an overhaul. Currently the ones available on the site do not adequately answer questions on family history research and there are probably other areas where questions need to be added. Possible FAQs about our services from a range of people would help us greatly, as they would provide us with some objective examples of what people might be looking for.

Please imagine that you are approaching the council web site for the first time (www.medway.gov.uk) and click on the link to FAQs (top of the page next to A-Z) from the homepage. What sort of question about Archives and Local Studies Services might you want answered?

Please e-mail any suggestions to: april.lambourne@medway.gov.uk

Thank you.



*From the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre Couchman Collection, ref.: DE402/7/34(L)
Postcard photograph entitled Bandstand, Castle Gardens comprising view of Rochester castle grounds under snow looking from point adjacent to west side of long walk north-west towards bandstand, showing benches, shrubs, bushes and trees. c.1909*

A Stroll through Strood

Barbara Marchant

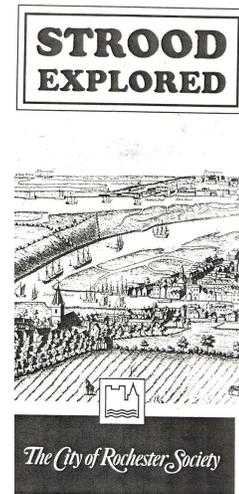
Local historian Barbara Marchant was the founding member of the Strood Heritage Society, set up to promote the history and interests of the people of Strood. Barbara was born in Kent, and although she and her husband have now retired to Somerset, Strood, the Medway Towns and Kent are still close to her heart.

As a follow-up to Norma Crowe's article on the Strood Heritage Society in the previous issue of The Clock Tower (03), Barbara now gives the background to the historical walk round Strood she originally devised for visitors – and local residents.

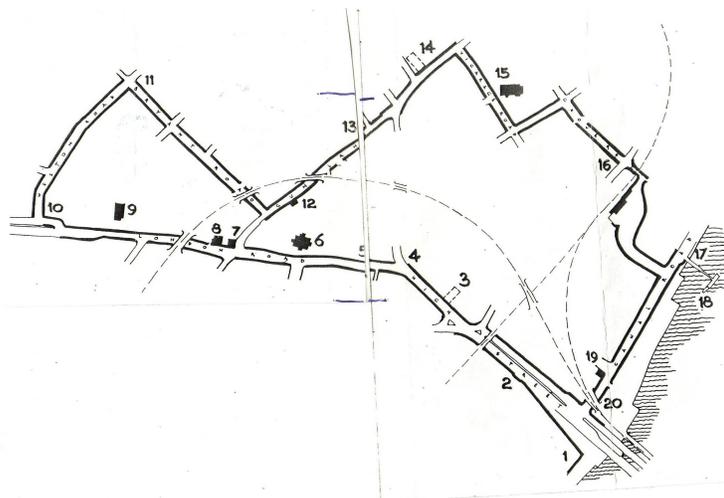
Compared to historic Rochester with its castle and cathedral, and the connection to Charles Dickens, Strood has had a very low level of interest for visitors and residents alike.

For instance, in Arthur Mee's *The Kings England: Kent*, "Strood. It is part of Rochester, nothing of itself. Passing through Strood on a coach bound for London I asked my mother where we were. 'This is Strood,' she said, 'there's nothing here! Imagine her disgust when years later I came to live in despised Strood!'"

This attitude struck a sore point with me as although I was a city guide primarily concerned with Rochester, my then limited research told a very different story about Strood. So when the City of Rochester publications committee looked at updating their excellent walks leaflets and they decided to add *Strood Explored* to the list, guess who got the job?



You cannot possibly do justice to the full history of a place like Strood on one small leaflet. From its time when the church was but a chapel of ease to Frindsbury, and Strood was a small farming and fishing village, through its development into a manufacturing centre for cement and steam rollers. The addition of such new transport possibilities as the Thames and Medway Canal, and the development of the railway system all changed its character. *Strood Explored* is a taster to introduce people to the flavour of the place, and that is what I set out to do.



The development of the leaflet involved not just researching in the vast resources available at MALSC, but actually walking around Strood to search out a route that was interesting and also easy to walk in about an hour and a half to two hours.

The walk begins at Strood Esplanade and past the Civic Centre, which was once the offices of Aveling and Porter, the makers of steam road rollers (see the route map above, commencing at number 1). The road leads you into the High Street which, before the advent of the M2 motorway took two way traffic onto London in one direction, or to the coast at Dover in the other. Many of the businesses mentioned in the leaflet have now gone. For instance, Collis and Stace the ironmongers is now a petrol station. There was also the Invicta Picture Palace (see below), one of three cinemas in Strood.



From the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre Couchman Collection; ref. DE402/12/23: High Street (Watling Street, A2 trunk road), Strood. Reproduction postcard photograph of section of Strood High Street between North Street and Station Road, looking south-east towards railway viaduct (Medway Valley or North Kent Line), showing ranges of shops on north and south sides, including, left to right and clockwise, Invicta Picture

Palace (i.e. cinema), Boots Cash Chemists (Southern) Ltd. (no.54), railway viaduct with advertising slogan Advertise in the Kent Messenger and Fehrenbach [cf. Fernbank] Brothers, watchmakers and jewellers' shop, (no. 65) with Rolex sign and clock above shop front. Street scene shows motor cars, motor coach, pedestrians, overhead street lighting and decorated front of Invicta Picture Palace. Re-touched. Original exposed c.1930; reproduced by Kent County Council library service c.1980. p.23

Going back further in time, where there is now open space with seating was the site of the twelfth century Newark Hospital, where there was a row between the monks and the hospital and those from Rochester. North Street was originally known as Cage Lane because this is where the lock up stood, and at this important junction stood a Turnpike Gate where you paid to travel over the 'New Road' to Chatham. Opened in 1792 when the charge for a coach drawn by six horses was a shilling (5p), it closed amidst much rejoicing in 1876. Where the empty Safeways building stands was the site of Budden Biggs' Steam Brewery famous for their 'Body Building Beverages'. The same site was used later by a mineral water company.

Continuing on up Strood Hill past St Nicholas Church which was modernized in 1812 we enter an area of Victorian development with some very grand houses on Castle View Road. Thence into Weston Road and onwards into Bryant Road where the houses are smaller but still with some lovely details. On the pavement the original stopcock covers can still be seen bearing the dates and initials of the various water companies who brought improvement to life with the coming of piped water right into the houses. Many of the houses had cellars to where coal could be

delivered down a chute covered with a fancy iron plate. No more going out into the yard to get coal for the fire and no need to walk with buckets and jugs to the parish pump for water. As the walk continues on through South Eastern Terrace and under the tunnel to the railway station you pick up the footpath onto Canal Road. Note the wartime 'Dragon's Teeth' or tank traps which brings our story of Strood up into the twentieth century.

There is not much more to be seen, but if you would like to know more, then why not join the Strood Heritage Society? The Society was formed following my illustrated talk on Strood given at the Studies Centre in late 1998. So much interest in preserving and conserving Strood's history was shown that it confirmed my long felt interest in involving other people in not just preserving what was still in existence but also holding a watching brief on plans for the way Strood was managed for the future. With the help and encouragement of the staff at the Studies Centre, an initial meeting was set up in early 1999 which led to the formation of the Strood Heritage Society which continues to hold meetings with talks on a variety of subjects pertaining to Strood.

Meetings of the Strood Heritage Society 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. New members are warmly welcomed; for further information please contact the Chairman David Goodwin on 01634 717185.

The description of the historical walk around Strood is taken from the more detailed Strood Explored, written by Barbara Marchant. This is one of a series of leaflets produced by the City of Rochester Society, including Victorian and Edwardian Rochester Explored, Down the Medway (Rochester Pier to Kingsnorth) and A Tour through Dickensland. Further information on the City of Rochester Society follows.



From the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre Couchman Collection; ref. DE402/6/81/(U)

Photograph of Prior's Gate, Precinct, Rochester under snow, looking north-east along Precinct road leading to and through gateway, showing walls at right angles to camera in middle ground, rear of Minor Canon Row in right middle distance and top of cathedral central tower above gateway in distance. 4" x 2 3/4" (100mm x 70mm) Before 1904.

The City of Rochester Society

Alan Moss

Alan has lived in Rochester for sixty years, indeed for his entire life, and has been a member of the Rochester Society since 1977. He is a member of the Society's Executive Committee, Editor of the Society's quarterly journal The Newsletter, and is the Society Membership Secretary.

The City of Rochester Society is the amenity and historical society for the area which comprised the City immediately before reorganisation of local government in 1974; in other words the urban area of Rochester and Strood. In April of that year the City Council was abolished and the area merged with the Borough of Chatham and the Rural District of Strood to become first the Borough of Medway and then, in 1982, the City of Rochester upon Medway. The second reorganisation, in 1997/98 saw Rochester upon Medway merge with Gillingham under the Medway Unitary Authority. Unfortunately it was during this reorganisation that Rochester lost its 'official' city status. This continues to be a matter of great concern to the Society and one which we shall strive to rectify.

The Society currently has nearly 500 members across the UK and abroad. Its aims, as enshrined in its constitution, are to promote, for the benefit of the public generally and especially the inhabitants of the City of Rochester:

- public interest in and care for the beauty, history and character of the city and its surroundings;
- the development of a live, modern city, with the highest standards of architecture and planning;
- interest in cultural activities.

Next year - 2007 - the Society will celebrate its fortieth birthday. During those 40 years the City has undergone changes too many and various to list in this short article. Indeed the Society emerged in its present form from a protest group which had been set up to fight plans for a road scheme which, had it come to fruition, would have cut a wide swathe through the City just to the south of the Castle and Cathedral. Suffice to say that common sense prevailed and Rochester's notorious post-war traffic problems were eased by the widening of Corporation Street to take two way traffic.

Since 1967 the Society has remained vigilant. Development applications are examined by the Planning Sub-Committee and representations made to the relevant authorities whenever we feel that a proposal will have an undesirable impact on the City and, in particular, on the central conservation areas. The Society actively promotes good design and maintenance through an annual conservation award which is given to the person or organisation having made, in the Society's judgement, the most significant contribution to conservation in the City during the preceding year. The award for 2005, presented in July of 2006, was made to Mick Pollard, sign writer, for the excellence of his work on many shop fronts in the city centre (see below).

Financial support has been given over the years to a number of worthy projects including the Holocaust Memorial window at the Synagogue [see Issue 03 of *The Clock Tower*], the restoration of the bells in St Margaret's Church and repairs to the ceiling in St Nicholas' Church,

Strood. The Society demonstrates its commitment to conservation and the general well being of the City in other ways. For example, we have representatives on consultative bodies such as the Rochester Conservation Areas Advisory Group, the City Centre Forum and the Rochester Association of Businesses. Some of the major issues with which we are currently concerned include the riverside regeneration schemes at Rochester, Strood and Temple Marsh, the conservation of Eastgate House and its future use, the conservation of Rochester Castle and improvements to the interpretation and presentation of the City's heritage.

We have sent representatives to the various workshops and consultative meetings which have been held on the regeneration schemes and have put detailed comments to the consultants and/or Medway Council in each case. The Rochester Riverside scheme is one of the largest schemes of its type in the Thames Gateway area and covers a very large portion of the city centre area. It is an area of former industrial land which has lain largely derelict for many years and, being to the north of the railway embankment, is out of sight of most people. One of the greatest challenges now facing the planners and developers of this site will be to re-integrate it with the main body of the City, so as not to create a 'them and us' situation. This is something which the Society feels strongly about and we have lost no opportunity to make this point. Other issues on which we feel strongly are quality of design of the new buildings, good on-going maintenance and access to the river. The history and heritage of the Medway Towns are so closely tied up with the river that it would be a great pity if, in developing these riverside sites, we turned our back on our great defining feature.

The Society supports the amenity society movement more widely through its membership of such bodies as the Civic Trust and the Kent Federation of Amenity Societies.

The future of Eastgate House is a major talking point in the City at present and the Society - which deplored the abrupt closure of the Dicken's Centre - was invited by Medway Council to be represented on the steering group formed in 2005 to advise consultants on the production of a concept and business plan. Locum Consulting have now presented their report which recommends that the whole Eastgate House complex become a cultural centre based on the broad theme of writing and literature. The Society is now represented on a stakeholder group, alongside the Council, English Heritage, University College of the Creative Arts and others to take the project forward.

The Society is also heavily involved in tourism in Rochester. For nearly 30 years the Society's guides have been offering conducted walking tours of the city centre to residents and visitors. Tours for the public operate every Saturday, Sunday, Wednesday and bank holidays between Good Friday and the end of September and during all the major festivals. Over the years many thousands of people have been introduced to the City in this way and have gone on to explore its delights further. To accompany these tours the Society has produced a leaflet entitled *Rochester - a walk around the City* and a more comprehensive booklet called *Rochester's Heritage Trail*. The Society is represented on the Medway Attractions Group and the Medway Tourism Association and has recently been involved in discussions on the way in which the City's offering to visitors can be improved. Two highlights in the City's calendar are the Dicken's festivals - in June and December - and one of the main attractions at both of those festivals is the Craft Fair which now takes place in the Castle Gardens. This was instigated by the Society early in the life of the festivals and from a relatively small beginning has now grown into an impressive show of crafts

of all sorts. Held on the first weekend of December, the festival and craft fair are very popular with visitors, especially just before Christmas, with its array of attractive gifts to buy.



From the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre Couchman Collection; ref. DE402/10/59(L) The Vines, Rochester. Photograph of the eastern corner of The Vines under snow, looking east from point inside The Vines across main north-west/south-east path towards School House (King's School, Rochester), showing bench and avenue of

bare trees in middle ground and rear of Baptist Church, Crow Lane/Maidstone Road in left distance and part of front of Restoration House, also Crow Lane/Maidstone Road in right distance. 5 3/8" x 3 3/8" (136mm x 85mm) A note on rear suggests before 1939; Couchman's accompanying notes suggest 1947 or 1958.

In addition to those already mentioned, the Society has a number of books and pamphlets to its name, produced under the auspices of its Publications sub-committee. These include a series of pamphlets on the areas away from the normal tourist circuit with titles such as *Victorian and Edwardian Rochester*, *Eastgate Without and Strood Explored* [see Barbara Marchant's article *A Stroll through Strood* above]. More substantial works have included *The Dutch Raid*, telling the story of the Dutch Navy's raid on the Medway in 1667; *Merrily to Frensbury*, a history of the Parish of Frindsbury, and *Rochester - the Past 2000 Years*, which is a chronological account of the main events in the City's history up to the year 2000.

Last but not least in this catalogue of the Society's activities are the quarterly journal and the regular members' meetings. *The Newsletter* appears in February, May, August and November and aims not only to keep members abreast of relevant issues and events of concern to the Society, but also to entertain them with historical articles and personal reminiscences of members. It is illustrated with photographs and also gives notice of cultural events coming up locally, especially those involving Rochester-based organisations such as the Choral Society, the Symphony Orchestra and the Little Theatre. Our members' meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month (except July and August) in the auditorium above the Visitor Information Centre (95 High Street Rochester). Guest speakers are invited to talk on a range of topics, the majority with a Rochester or Kent flavour. At the December meeting we are usually entertained by members of Medway Opera and the evening concludes with some light seasonal refreshments.

I hope this gives a flavour of what the City of Rochester Society is about. If you support our aims and would like to join us you would be very welcome. Our annual membership fees are: £7.00 per adult, £5.00 for those under the age of 16 and £21.00 for firms and other organisations. Life membership currently costs £70.00. A membership application form can be obtained from me, Alan Moss (Membership Secretary), 32 Powlett Road, Frindsbury, Rochester, ME2 4RD (telephone 01634 721886) or from our web site at www.city-of-rochester.org.uk. We look forward to welcoming you.



Left: (from left to right) Bob Ratcliffe (President of the City of Rochester Society) who presented the Conservation Award, Mick Pollard, signwriter, having just received the award, Colin Smith, the owner of CSA (Charles D Smith and Associates), and Sue Haydock, councillor, Heritage Champion for Medway Council and a member of the Society.



*From the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre Couchman Collection; ref. DE402/7/34(U)
 Photograph looking north-west across Rochester Castle grounds under snow, showing from left to right, long walk running from left middle ground to centre distance lined with chairs and benches, bandstand, trees, remnant of Queen Victoria's 1887 jubilee memorial, boundary fence alongside Castle Hill and buildings on Castle Hill. Also visible in distance, Rochester Bridge and Strood. 5 3/4" x 3 3/4" (145mm x 95mm) c.1931 x c.1939*

The Newcomb War Diary 1939-1945

Sheila Erwin

Sheila is the Honorary Secretary of the Chatham Historical Society. The Newcomb War Diary has been lent to her by the owner Gerald Newcomb. Written by hand by Mr George West, Newcomb's Company Secretary during the Second World War, the Diary is leather bound with gold title and 22 inches by 18 inches wide. Mr West wrote one page per month, one line of local, national and international news per day.

The Newcomb Diary was written on the instruction of Mr William Newcomb, by Mr George West. At the time I doubt if they could have visualised what a marvellous record of life during the war would be the result of Mr West's painstaking work. The diary is a unique parallel history of the world conflict. For instance:

“Sept 28th 1939. First War Budget. Income Tax 7/6d in £. Warsaw has fallen.

Oct 5th 1940. Bombs fell on Ordance and Ross St 11.30 am. A few killed in Chatham. Axis partners met at Brenner yesterday.

Oct 9th 1940. Bombs fell on Gillingham. Big air attack on London. Compulsory air-raid insurance to be introduced.”

As the number of air attacks increased during the Battle of Britain, Mr West started noting in the margin of the diary every day the time of each 'alert' and each 'all clear'. In the month of November 1940, the siren sounded *113 times*. One can only imagine the disruption this caused to people's lives, day and night.

As the number of theatres of war increased, Mr West managed to record the events in Europe, Africa, the Balkans, Greece, the Far East, and also the number of raids on the island of Malta. He recorded the number of planes lost, the number of enemy shot down, the victories and losses of the royal navy and much more.

“15th Feb 1942. Singapore has fallen. Japan invades Sumatra. Medway Towns War Weapons Week, target £750,000.” A later entry states over £850,000 was collected.

Changes in food rationing, call-up regulations for men and women, lighting restrictions, cigarette and whisky prices, fuel shortages, fire guard duty, travel restrictions...Mr West recorded them all.

Mr Gerald Newcomb first allowed me to borrow the Diary in 1989 when various organisations in the Medway Towns were setting up an exhibition to mark the 50th anniversary of the start of World War II in the old Town Hall. The Diary was a great success with many visitors, and my son, Christopher, and I realised then that it should be available to everyone in the Medway Towns. Unfortunately at the time, the money and the technology to make a replica were not available, although Mr Newcomb was quite happy for it to be done.

In the years since, we have continued, with Mr Newcomb's indulgence, to use the Diary at various local and family events, all the while talking and writing to anyone I thought might help with the reproduction. An appearance on Meridian TV in July 2004 brought no response – I was running out of steam! Then, this year the Chatham Historical Society was given a generous gift

by Mrs Paine, in memory of her husband, the late Mr William Paine. With the addition of society funds, we are now able to commission a replica. Sadly, Mrs Paine died before this was confirmed, but her son, Mr C Paine, is delighted that his parents will be remembered in this way.

The society now has to confirm arrangements with the printers and look into the possibility of having smaller black and white working copies made for research purposes. There is also an index which Chris and I put together in 1989 which must be checked, which will hopefully be available with the working copies. These additional copies will, of course, need funding. There may also be a cost involved in creating a safe place to display the replica. At the time of writing, we have no idea where this will be, but we are anxious for it to be at a location where everyone in the Medway Towns can see it.

The Newcomb Family

F&H Newcomb, Navy Tailors, Hosiers, Hatters and Shirt Makers was established in 1854 and the Chatham shop was at number 133 High Street; the ladies department was at 5 Railway Street. They were high class shops and business was good, especially during wartime when thousands of naval men passed through the town. A large staff was kept busy making shirts, uniforms, hats and breeches in rooms above the shop. The well dressed shop window proclaimed they were, 'sole agents for Jaeger wool clothing' and 'Boys' Sandon Suits'. The ladies department contained very elegant, expensive clothing. I remember in my youth being unable to buy. Before the Pentagon was built, Chatham had a lot of very good shops, as can be seen by looking at the architecture of the upper floors and roofs of the buildings in the High Street, Railway Street and Military Road. With the construction of the Sir John Hawkins overpass, the High Street shop moved along to numbers 87 to 89 on the corner of Medway Street (see photograph). Today the family's connection continues, with Mr Gerald Newcomb in charge of the business which now offers dress hire for men under the name *Penguins*.



The Paine Family

The late Mr William Paine was a founding member of the Chatham Historical Society in 1950. In May 2004 at the age of 97 he was still a member and wrote two very interesting letters in answer to my request for his memories of Chatham.

He wrote that the business started with his grandfather as a pawnbroker's assistant who progressed to become a successful financier and Mayor of Chatham nine times around the time of the First World War. He founded the Chatham (now Kent) Reliance Building Society and his grandson wrote, "that speaks for himself, for everything about him was reliable and thorough."

The shop at 168 High Street, Chatham, next to the Central Hall, was built in the 1890s with a pawnshop in the rear. It was a men's outfitters. The upper window frames are brass and have railings in which the initial 'W.P.' (William Paine) can still be seen today. The firm had two other shops, one on the corner of High Street and Station Road, Strood, and one at Paine's Corner, High Street, Grays, Essex. The photograph shows the Chatham High Street shop, courtesy of *The Chatham News*, 19th March 1971. The photograph below shows how Paines had changed by 1971 (also courtesy of *The Chatham News*).



Many people will remember the Lampson Paragon system in the Chatham shop which carried payment from the shop floor to a cashier in an elevated position in the rear. The cash was catapulted in a wheeled cup along wires to the cash desk where it was checked and change sent back. Quite entertaining.

Our Mr Paine started the business in 1923 and on his father's death continued to run the business with his brother, Eric. On returning from war service, he made changes to bring the shop up to date, and out went the Lampson paragon.

Eric was President of the Chatham Historical Society at one time, and the record of his brother's memories will be kept safe in the Society's archives.

The Committee and members of the Society feel that it is particularly fitting that the Newcomb and Paine families, who have played significant parts in Chatham's history should be joined in this way, and the Town's Historical Society should be able to make it happen.

The Chatham Historical Society was founded in 1950. Further information can be obtained from the Society's website at www.chathamhistoricalsoc.uk.com. Meetings are held at St Barbara's Church Hall, Maxwell Road, Brompton, Chatham on the second Thursday of each month, excepting January and August.

Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre
Couchman collection
DE402/10/64 (L)



From the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre Couchman Collection; ref. DE402/10/64(L) Watts' Avenue, Rochester. Postcard photograph entitled Watts' Avenue, Rochester comprising winter-time view of tree-lined avenue under snow, looking west from point in carriageway

towards junction with St. Margaret's Street, showing pavements, brick gate pillars and private residences set back from each side of road. On rear, message from N. P[otter?] to [Mr. And] Mrs. Potter, parents (M & F), 2 Northampton Street, Cambridge, Cambridgeshire, asking for a letter in return and stating he or she lives in Watts' Avenue. Published by G. [?] A. Morris, 24 High Street, Rochester. Postmarked 2 July 1906 [?]

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.

As 2006 comes to a close, the volunteer researchers for the programme are still busy in the archives. There have been some IT training classes and the village survey fieldwork has been completed. Dr Hann is currently working on Chapter 9, External Linkages, of which he has kindly provided the following extract.

The Lower Medway Valley and its Regional Context

Most local history studies focus on a particular parish or community, and the events that occurred there. The *England's Past for Everyone* project is somewhat different in that each of the ten county-based studies sets out to explore a particular place, or group of places, within its wider regional context. This is certainly the case in Kent because the evolution of the lower Medway valley from a rural backwater to a thriving industrial district can only properly be understood by looking at changes taking place in the wider economy. This includes factors such as the decline of industrial activity in the Weald, the expansion of the dockyards at Chatham and the ever-increasing population of London.

At a local level the parishes of the lower Medway valley (Frindsbury, Strood, Cuxton, Halling, Snodland, Wouldham, Burham and Aylesford) had close ties with their immediate hinterland. Indeed, it has proved possible to identify clear 'neighbourhood areas' based on surname distributions, marriage patterns and patterns of land ownership. Aylesford, for instance, had close connections with Burham, East Malling, Ditton, Boxley, Allington and Maidstone. Both the Earl of Aylesford and Charles Milner of Preston Hall held land across these parishes, and census data suggests migrant flows were concentrated within this area. Halling and Snodland were most closely linked to neighbouring Birling and Luddesdown, with whom they shared the workhouse at the former Bishop's Palace in Halling. Many examples can be picked out to illustrate the concentration of activity within these neighbourhood areas. For instance, in 1868 Rev. Hornibrook of St. Faith's Mission District in Maidstone noted that, "Many men walk three, four, or even five miles [from Maidstone] to work at Burham, Aylesford, and other places, where there are not a sufficient number of cottages, and some have to start soon after 6.00 a.m.." Similarly, Thomas Fowler, a twelve-year old boy working at Burham brick and cement works, complained that, "I live at East Malling, and walk in to work here every morning, and back every night... I am always very tired by the time I get home."

Beyond the locality the lower Medway valley had important links with other parts of west Kent. Migrants were drawn to the expanding brick and cement industries from broad swathes of the county. Birthplaces recorded in the census suggest that large numbers came from the greensand parishes to the south and west of Maidstone, but these were also migrants from the Hoo peninsula, Thames estuary and the Weald. By the 1860s over 60 per cent of the population in most of the eight parishes were migrants. There were also large seasonal flows of people into the area during the hop harvest. William Marshal noted that, "A few days before the picking begins, the lanes, and village greens, swarm with these strolling pickers; men, women, children, and infants... in a country where more is grown than can be harvested by its own inhabitants."

Special trains brought hop-pickers from London and the towns of west Kent at reduced fares, and many other migrant workers walked to the hop-growing districts. These were centred on Maidstone, but extended north into the study area. Migrant workers were billeted in communal lodgings or *hopper houses* that were often very overcrowded and insanitary.

Links with London were also important. The capital was an important destination for migrants, particularly women looking for work in domestic service and ambitious young men looking to gain a trade through apprenticeship to one of the London livery companies. The metropolis was also a vital market for the agricultural and industrial products of the Medway valley. Most goods passed down the river Medway by barge and then continued into the Thames estuary either by passing around the Hoo peninsula, or via the Thames-Medway canal. By the 1870s it is estimated there were 17,000 shipments entering the port of London from the Kent and Essex coast. Most boats plying this trade were small vessels: sloops, cutters and spritsail barges. Their cargoes included bricks, hay, hops, corn, timber and cement; humble commodities, but essential to the capital's economy. The lower Medway valley played an important part in the growth of this trade – its brickfields and cement works provided many of the construction materials needed to build the Victorian metropolis. Indeed, both the Burham Brick, Lime and Cement Company and the Aylesford Pottery Company supplied thousands of bricks for the London sewers and Thames Embankment. London was also the centre for fashion and entertainment, and the shopping place of choice not just for the wealthy, but increasingly for ordinary people as an occasional treat. The diaries of late nineteenth century Medway residents are filled with accounts of excursions to the capital, window shopping in Oxford Street, or strolling round the Royal Parks.

Of course, we should not forget that the Medway valley also had extensive links with the wider world. Rochester was a significant port for much of the period, involved not only in coastal trade but also links with the continent. In 1789 there were 177 vessels registered in the port, amounting to 6,712 tons. The port also handled an extensive trade in coal from Hartlepool and Middlesborough, needed to fuel the cement works, breweries and maltings along the Medway. Bricks, cement, paper and farm products were sent overseas as well as serving the London market. Many residents of the eight parishes also had personal experience of foreign climes. Some were sailors or fishermen, particularly in Strood and Frindsbury, others had been born overseas. Census data reveals a substantial contingent of foreigners, concentrated in Frindsbury, Strood and Snodland. In 1901 the largest contingents were 95 people from Ireland and 92 from Scotland. There were, however, also substantial numbers from Europe (42), North America (30) and the East Indies (30). Many migrants, particularly those from Ireland worked in unskilled manual jobs as general labourers or cement workers; others though were employed in skilled occupations, such as engineer, surgeon or schoolmaster. Of particular note were the 18 Scottish papermakers in Snodland and 45 mainly European mariners listed with their ships in Frindsbury and Strood.

What this study shows is that external links impacted on the lower Medway valley at a number of spatial scales from the local to the global. In particular the growing influence of London helped shape the Medway valley, but the area was never totally within the orbit of the capital, and as such retained a distinctive local culture. Indeed, it could be argued that by fostering industrialisation within the valley, links with London and the wider world helped to build a new industrial culture in the area.

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.



Strange Historical Coincidences: A Tale for Christmas

Seven years ago when the Millennium Bug was considered a distinct and frightening possibility, we and our neighbours were embroiled in a particularly nasty planning dispute with the chap next door. Another consequence of the time was that house prices had begun to soar and in leafy areas such as ours with easy access to London, people had just started waking up to the fact that a large garden was the late twentieth century version of one of those small untapped oilfields in Texas. Our next door neighbour was a successful businessman and realised that his plot at the end of a strip of 1920s houses was spacious enough to demolish his own home and erect a detached and two semis in its place – cutting down countless beautiful trees and a hitherto unprotected ancient hedgerow in the process. We realised that the ancient hedgerow might be the key to scuppering our neighbour's plans, though in the end the covenant attached to the land proved to be the most useful device, and now we have two well proportioned homes in the place of the mini-estate that was originally on the drawing board. The point of this issue's article is not to harp on about the perceived injustices of the UK planning system, but rather to show how local and family history can raise some uncanny and unexpected coincidences. In the course of learning about ancient hedgerows and covenants, I received many telephone calls from elderly residents eager to help in any way they could. A lot of this information had absolutely nothing to do with the issue in hand, but instead became the starting point of a fascinating local history project and the beginning of many bizarre connections.

One evening I received a call from a lady who had moved to our town, Harpenden, during the Second World War to work at the famous Rothamsted Research Laboratories. It transpired that she and her husband had viewed our house in 1950 when it was up for sale. The following week, I invited her round for coffee and she began a meticulous inspection of our house. Despite her advancing years, this lady had an amazing recall, remembering minute details about the early state of the building. As she is an artist, this is possibly not so surprising, but it was unnerving nevertheless. As we had recently completed a renovation project, we knew where old fireplaces had been, where panelling had been ripped out, and all this she confirmed. Our next meeting took us to the grounds of Rothamsted itself where we explored one of the old houses built a few years before our own, and by the same family, the SALISBURYs. Though this house was considerably grander, the similarities were striking and it was interesting for me to see what our old fireplaces would have looked like and what the linenfold panelling was like before it was thrown on a bonfire (another neighbour confirmed *that*). In the course of this outing, my friend talked about someone she had worked with at Rothamsted during the war – the scientist Dr Winifred BRENCHLEY. The hairs on the back of my neck went up again. “Brenchley? I am a Brenchley,” I blurted. It was my great grandmother from Cliffe who had the name. My mother and I had been investigating them for some time, but we had never come across a Winifred.

Further research revealed that Winifred came from Camberwell in London, and her grandfather from Chatham, though how her branch of Brenchleys links to ours is still uncertain. What is certain is the significant part Winifred played in the war effort; her work on weed seeds and the development of wheat and barley grain helped to increase crop yields for a hungry population. Such pioneering and important work continues at Rothamsted.

My great great great grandfather, Edward Brenchley, also a distant cousin of Winifred, married Susan OSMOTHERLY in Cliffe in 1817. The Osmotherlys have kept me and a couple of other researchers intrigued for several years now with their collection of colourful characters. Unable to find any trace of the baptism of my own Susan, I cannot be certain how she fits into the family tree, though I have a shrewd idea as each section of the Osmotherly family in Cliffe appears to slot into a clearly defined group. These groups are determined by location and their social standing, and have much to do with whether they are descended from first or second wives of a particular Osmotherly male. In other words, the husband may have left financial provision in his will for the second wife and children, whereas the children of the first wife were forgotten, and sometimes vice versa.

One such Osmotherly group in the late 1700s moved away from Cliffe to Lambeth, a move which was not untypical for families at this time – and one which Dr Andrew Hann discusses in his article above. Sadly, this family did not fare better in London, and the next generation moved again. The eldest son joined the army. He served in the Crimean War – and then moved to *Hertfordshire*. Once again, rather than travelling to the Medway Archives, I found myself in a graveyard in Old Welwyn, trying to find graves of the Pennyfather family, local farmers and landowners. I linked up with Pennyfather researcher Trevor Penfold whose website and knowledge of the family was invaluable (<http://myweb.tiscali.co.uk/penfold/index.html>). He was also fascinated by how two families as different as chalk and cheese could have come together.

A couple of months later, as Osmotherly research progressed, we started investigating another twig of the same branch of the tree, and discovered yet another Hertfordshire connection. James Osmotherly, born in Stoke in 1853, married a girl from Redbourn. Nothing so strange in that, apart from the fact that her parents decided to leave Redbourn shortly after she was born and move to *Harpenden*. Not only that, but to a street literally just a stone's throw away from my own. It didn't take me long to discover a reason why this part of Hertfordshire was attractive – and important – to these Osmotherly men and, I expect, to many others. The area was rife with breweries, and James from Stoke was a brewer's drayman.

I was relieved to have found an explanation for these coincidences. However, this feeling was not to last for long. As I noted earlier, despite the fact that I cannot find a baptismal record for my own great great great grandmother, I have a clear idea of how she connects with the rest of the Osmotherlys. I know that she has a close connection to William Osmotherly, who was the illegitimate son of a Robert GATES. To try and find out more, I investigated the Gates family further and discovered that Robert's sister, Rebecca, married into the RUCK family. I was surprised to find their son George in the 1891 Census with a member of the Osmotherly clan in Lambeth. However, when I discovered him in the 1881 census living just a few doors down from my great great great grandfather in *Wouldham*, I almost fell off my chair. George Ruck was living cheek by jowl with my three times great grandfather on my *grandfather's* side of the family. The Osmotherlys are on my *grandmother's* side.

From the Archives...



In this issue, we are repeating the photographs and illustrations held at the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre which remain unidentified. If you know where these photographs were taken and if you have a story to tell about the locations, please contact the Editor, Amanda Thomas.

The Friends of Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre wish you a very happy Christmas and a prosperous New Year