



A FOMA CELEBRATION!

Join us to celebrate ten years of supporting the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre and support the move to the new Strood site

EVERYONE IS WELCOME !

Saturday 25 March 2017, 2.00 – 6.00 pm

**The Copper Rivet Distillery
Leviathan Way, Chatham Dockyard, ME4 4LP**

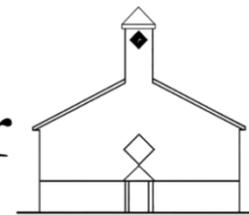
**Including a tour of the distillery and gin tasting!
FOOD – DRINK - ENTERTAINMENT – GRAND RAFFLE**

Tickets £20

**Contact FOMA Secretary Odette Buchanan: 72 Jersey Rd, Strood, ME2 3PE;
odette_buchanan@yahoo.co.uk; 01634 718231
Cheques made payable to 'Friends of Medway Archives'**

**NO PAPER TICKETS ISSUED; RECEIPTS SENT BY EMAIL OR POSTED IF
S.A.E. PROVIDED**

The Clock Tower



Issue Number 45: February 2017
£2.00; free to members

The Friends of Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre
Excepted Charity registration number XR92894

Goodbye Old Medway Archives!



The move to the Bryant Road, Strood, site is now under way! See page 34.
The Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre will be closed from 5 pm, Friday 3 March until 9 am, Tuesday 2 May 2017.

JOIN US TO CELEBRATE 10 YEARS OF FOMA ON 25 MARCH AND TO RAISE MONEY FOR THE NEW ARCHIVES - SEE PAGE 5!

New series starts inside – Betty Cole on the history of Rochester's St Margaret's Parish Poor-House.

ALSO INSIDE - 2017 AGM INSERT AND FOMA MEMBERSHIP REMINDER.

Remembering the French Dead



There has been much in the news just lately about soil erosion on Deadman's Island near the Isle of Sheppey. In her article on page 6 Sue Haydock reveals that the exposure of coffins and skeletons is not a new story.

Left: The remembrance service at the memorial to the French dead on the south side of St. George's Centre, Chatham Maritime. The memorial and the remains of French prisoners of war were moved from St Mary's Island, Chatham in 1904.

Photograph by Sue Haydock.

Below: the invitation to Henk van der Linden's award ceremony in March in The Hague (see Tessa Towner's article on page 3).



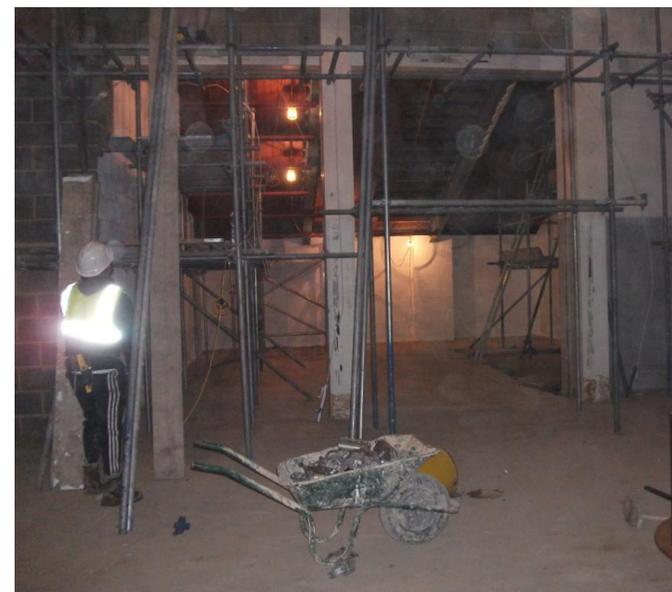
Goodbye Old Strong Room; Hello New Strong Room!

Left: the old strong room at the clock tower building.

Below: the new strong room under construction at the Bryant Road site.

Photographs here and on the front cover courtesy of Medway Council.

Photograph on back cover by Elaine Gardner.



On the occasion of the presentation of the British Empire Medal to Mrs Hiltje van Eck, Mrs Jeanne Melchers and Mr Henk van der Linden



*The British Ambassador
requests the pleasure of your company
for a vin d'honneur
on Friday 17 March, 12 pm*

*Ambassador's Residence
Plein 1813, no 1
2514 JN The Hague*

*RSVP by 9 March
Dress: Tenu de Ville*

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Chairman's Letter

Tessa Towner



A belated Happy New Year to you all!

As I write this, MALSC is about to start its long-awaited move to the old library building in Bryant Road, Strood. There will be a short closure period from 5 pm on Friday 3 March until 9 am, Tuesday 2 May. The date of the official launch is still to be confirmed.

Please make a note in your dairies for the next FOMA event. At 7.30 pm on 14 March at Frindsbury Parish Hall Rob Flood will be giving a talk entitled, 'A Rats Tale'. What an intriguing title! Later that month, our *Clock Tower* Editor, Amanda Thomas and I will be heading off to Holland for a very special occasion. Our dear friend and FOMA Life Member, Henk van der Linden, is to be honoured by HM The Queen. On Friday 17 March he is to be presented with the British Empire Medal by the Queen's representative, the British Ambassador to the Netherlands. Henk has worked ceaselessly to unravel the story of the Live Bait Squadron in 1914. His work on the men and boys from the Medway Towns who perished in the sinking of the three cruisers during those early days of WWI has touched and changed the lives of many people here and in the Netherlands. Amanda and I were thrilled to receive an invitation from the British Ambassador (see page 2) and will be travelling on the Eurostar for the event. In case you are wondering what the dress code 'tenue de ville' means, Amanda looked it up in the internet. According to *Wikipedia*, 'Tenue de ville is a dress code, typified by a suit and necktie. On the scale of formality, informal attire is more formal than casual but less formal than semi-formal.' No, I'm none the wiser either, but we will be dressing very smartly and I understand Amanda will be wearing a hat!

It is hard to believe that FOMA has been in existence for ten years. The committee and I have worked tirelessly during this time and we have achieved a tremendous amount. To celebrate, we are holding an afternoon event on March 25 from 2 to 6pm at the Copper Rivet Distillery in the newly restored Dockyard Pump Room No 5 at Dockside. It is certain to be quite an event and tickets are limited, so please make sure you book early. Details are on page 5 and we look forward to seeing you there!

New Members

A warm welcome to new FOMA members Wendy Morris and John and Ann Hubbard.

Secretary's Report

Odette Buchanan



Hullo and belated greetings for 2017 – hope you will be happy, healthy and wealthy at least until 2018!

2017 hasn't got as many high-profile historical anniversaries or commemorations as 2016 but there are still a few worth remembering. Besides the horrific, mud-sloshing three month battle that was Passchendaele, 1917 saw the first recording of a jazz band issued: Dixieland Jass (sic) Band One Step and Livery Stable Blues. 150 years ago Strauss's Blue Danube Waltz was ALSO first performed. Staying with musical anniversaries, Handel's Water Music was performed for a floating audience on George I's barge down the River Thames, and the BBC launched Radio 1 in 1967. That year also saw Kent's Mick Jagger and Keith Richards up on drug charges – who remembers the poster that said 'Let him who is without sin jail the first Stone?'

It was 1517 when Martin Luther set the reformation in motion by nailing to a church door his objections to Catholicism. Last - but by no means least - I bet you don't know when the first one-way streets were introduced in the City of London? It was in 1617 to try and alleviate cart traffic jams! Have you tried driving round the City recently?!

Back at 2017 we are all looking forward to FOMA's 10th Anniversary celebrations on 25 March at the Copper River Distillery next to Chatham Dockyard (see page 3). **Don't forget to contact me for your tickets** – numbers are restricted and booking has already started! It should be an exciting occasion – not only will we be sampling the new Dockyard Gin but there will be a giant cheque presentation from the City of Rochester Society to FOMA for an Uscan fiche/film reader for the new MALSC premises in Bryant Road, Strood.

That reminds me – get any outstanding research done soonest – MALSC will be closing at the beginning of March until they re-open at Bryant Road in May (see the front cover). On that exciting note I'll wish all the staff a hassle-free move and look forward to the grand re-opening!

About The Clock Tower

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

Editorial deadlines

Please note, the deadline is the **last** Monday (or Tuesday when a Bank Holiday occurs) of January, April, July and October. Articles, letters, photos and any information to be considered for inclusion in the journal must be received before this date by the Editor, Mrs Amanda Thomas, 72 Crabtree Lane, Harpenden, AL5 5NS, Hertfordshire; amanda@ajthomas.com.

The copy deadline for Issue 46 of *The Clock Tower* is Monday 24 April 2017, with publication on Wednesday 17 May 2017.

Publication date

The fourth Wednesday following the editorial deadline.

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

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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 at www.foma-lsc.org/newsletter.html

Further Information

Further information on the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre can be obtained on the MALSC website www.medway.gov.uk/malsc or by writing to Medway Archives Office, c/o Medway Council, Gun Wharf, Dock Road, Chatham, Kent, ME4 4TR. Telephone +44 (0)1634 332714; fax +44 (0)1634 297060; email: malsc@medway.gov.uk

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

Membership enquiries should be directed to the Membership Secretary, Betty Cole, 98 The Wharf, Dock Head Road, Chatham ME4 4ZS, Kent. Telephone: 01634 892976; email: betty-cole@outlook.com

Gillingham and Rainham Local History Society

The Society meets on the second Friday of each month from September to June at Byron Road School, Gillingham, ME7 5XX (car parking at the rear, accessed from Milton Road) on the second Friday of each month (September to July) 7.00pm with meeting starting at 7.15 pm.

10 March, *Pocahontas*, a talk by Christopher Bull.

7 April, *Crossings of the Lower Thames and Medway*, a talk by Rob Poole.

12 May, AGM and Quiz Night.

9 June, Members' Evening, including screening of *The North Kent Marshes* DVD.

New members and visitors are always welcome; annual membership £20, visitors £3 per meeting. For further information, contact Val Barrand on 07947 583327 or email lupusrufus@sky.com



Blue Town Heritage Centre, The Criterion Music Hall and Cinema

www.thecriterionbluetown.co.uk/#!criterion-music-hall/cb3i

The present Heritage Centre and café are on the site of two earlier establishments. Originally the New Inn in 1868, the site became The Royal Oxford Music Hall. The following year the building, situated a few doors down from the court house, became The Criterion public house, which included to the rear a music hall called The Palace of Varieties. This offered "rational amusement for all classes" including, in April 1876, a one armed juggler! In 1879 the earlier building was replaced with a brick built one. The Heritage Centre is packed with items, memorabilia and artefacts, including an upstairs area dedicated to HMS *Victory*.

Open Tuesdays to Saturdays 10am - 3pm and for events. Entrance £2.00 and includes entrance to the Aviation annexe at Eastchurch. Entrance is free to Friends. To become a Friend costs just £5.00 a year, for this you receive information before it goes onto the website and invites to special Friends-only events, plus a regular newsletter.

Today the main space at the centre is occupied by the Criterion Music Hall, one of just a few remaining authentic Music Hall buildings, lovingly restored by Jenny and Ian Hurkett and their unbeatable team of volunteers. The Criterion stages professional Victorian style music hall shows (three seasons a year), cinema every Friday and theatre and live music shows; it is also available for private hire. Booking on 01795 662981 or by visiting the website: <http://www.thecriterionbluetown.co.uk/#!criterion-music-hall/cb3i>



The latest information can be found at:
www.kentarchaeology.org.uk/

Information from Paul Tritton, Hon. Press Officer, KAS; paul.tritton@btinternet.com

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Membership Reminder

In this issue the AGM booklet includes your FOMA Membership Reminder.
Please bring this with you to the AGM to renew your membership.

You can also pay on the FOMA website <http://foma-lsc.org/membership.html>, by Standing Order and by post.
Please contact: FOMA Membership Secretary, Mrs. B. Cole, 98 The Wharf, Dock Head Road, Chatham ME4 4ZS, Kent.
Queries can also be sent by email to Betty Cole at: betty-cole@outlook.com

**N.B. Betty saves stamps from all correspondence which are sent to raise funds for
The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association.**

Heritage News

Sue Haydock



The latest from our roving reporter, Medway Heritage Champion and FOMA Vice President

There has been much in the news just lately about soil erosion on Deadman's Island near the Isle of Sheppey. In this article Sue Haydock reveals that the exposure of coffins and skeletons is not a new story ...

Mayor Of Medway Remembers French Dead

Every year, a week or so after Remembrance Sunday, the Mayor of Medway, with French and other dignitaries, attends a service at the St. George's Centre, Chatham Maritime. Why should this be so? Please read on!

By 1798 a large number of French prisoners of war were incarcerated in England. In that year there were 30,625 French prisoners besides 300 officers on parole, confined in Portsmouth, Plymouth, Normancross, Liverpool, Edinburgh, Chatham and Stapleton. In 1790 the number was 25,646. Those imprisoned at Chatham were confined to hulks in Gillingham Reach and Short Reach, and the bodies of those who died were buried on the marsh land, now known as St. Mary's Island.

In 1854 the Admiralty purchased St. Mary's Island and the marsh land adjoining, to allow an extension of Chatham Dockyard, which had long been in contemplation. The Chatham Dockyard Extension Act was passed on 26 July, 1861, and work began after the construction of suitable dams had been completed; convict labour was employed. The convicts were drawn from various penal establishments, and were housed while the work was in progress, some in hulks in the river and later on ground which became the R.N. Barracks.

In 1868 the attention of the Secretary of State for Home Affairs was drawn to the burial ground at Prisoners' Bank. The bank was causing the exposure of skeletons and coffins and the Home Secretary requested the admiralty to remove the remains or to construct works to protect them.

(General Gordon, Lord Kitchener, John Chard VC) and the average Sapper who has helped the British Army move, fight and survive for over 200 years. The Royal Engineers Museum now has an e-newsletter. To subscribe for free, email 'Yes Please!' to deputycurator@re-museum.co.uk

During 2016-7 the Royal Engineers Museum is upgrading the heating and lighting systems. This means the main Museum building is closed from 13 May; the Bridging Gallery and Temporary Exhibition are still open. Because of this reduced space admission is FREE in 2016; there will still be a wide range of children's activities and the Somme exhibition will also be available.

Due to the building works at the Museum the main car park is closed. There is an overflow car park that can be found using the signs; please note this is a five minute walk from the main site.

Events

January 2014 - November 2018, First World War Battlefield Tour Groups.
For more information or to book please call: 01634 822312.

Opening hours: Tuesday – Friday 9.00am to 5.00pm; Saturday – Sunday and Bank Holidays: 11.30am to 5.00pm; CLOSED MONDAYS. Admission: pay once and get in for 12 months!
Adult: £7.80; Family: £20.80; Concession: £5.20; Children under 5: Free.

ADMISSION IS FREE DURING 2016 DUE TO THE RENOVATION WORKS. THE MUSEUM WILL BE RE-OPENING IN MAY 2017; SEE THE WEBSITE FOR FURTHER DETAILS.

The Rochester Bridge Trust

Further information from <http://www.rbt.org.uk/>

The Bridge Wardens' lectures are held in the medieval Bridge Chapel, 5 Esplanade, Rochester ME1 1QE, unless otherwise indicated. Refreshments available from 6.30 p.m. Lectures begin promptly at 7.00 p.m. Tickets are free but places are limited so **MUST** be booked in advance from Sue Reilly by email to sue@maxim-pr.co.uk or by telephone on 01892 513033.

ICE Kent & East Sussex Historical Engineering Group (KESHEG) lectures are held at various venues around Kent and East Sussex. To register for information about events, please email kesheg@gmail.com

Brompton History Research Group

www.bromptonhistory.org.uk/

Brompton village is a complex civilian area in the heart of a military world. To the south and east lie the Chatham Lines, a series of fortifications built to defend the Chatham Dockyard. To the west lies the Dockyard itself and to the north Brompton Barracks, home of the Royal Engineers.

For more information email bromptonhistoryresearchgroup@gmail.com

Healthy Walks

Every Tuesday, meet at Strood Library at 9.45 am. A guided and pleasant walk with wonderful views overlooking the Medway and Thames, and woodland paths. Duration about 60 minutes. Complimentary tea and coffee served in the library after the walk. Sorry - dogs not allowed in the library. Contact: 01634 333720.

Task Days

First Sunday of September, October, November, December. Meet at King Arthur's Drive Car Park 11.00 am. Bring your own tools or tools provided. Two hours of free, healthy fun!

For further details see park notice boards, www.friendsofbrommhill.org.uk, find us on Facebook or contact David Park, Secretary on 01634 718972, email: davidpark1999@yahoo.co.uk

The Chatham Historical Society

Meetings are held at The Lampard Centre, Sally Port, Brompton, ME7 5BU, **excepting January and August**. The Lampard Centre has easy disabled/wheelchair access and a small car park. There is plenty of unrestricted roadside parking space in Maxwell Road, about 50 metres away. Sally Port has some unrestricted roadside parking space, but please avoid the sections with the double yellow lines or the *No Parking* notices.

9th March 2017

Temple Manor & the Knights Templars, a talk by Len Feist.

The talk by Christoph Bull, Gravesham Round and About, has been rescheduled for May.

Doors open at 7:15 pm, meetings finish at 9:00 pm. Refreshments are available and visitors are very welcome. Admission: £1 for members, £3 for visitors. Further information is available at www.chathamhistoricalsoc.btck.co.uk

The Royal Engineers Museum, Library and Archive

Prince Arthur Road, Gillingham, Kent, ME4 4UG
www.re-museum.co.uk for more details

The Royal Engineers Museum is Kent's largest military museum, with a designated collection of historical and international importance. The many galleries tell the story of Britain's military engineers from the Roman period to the modern Corps of Royal Engineers. The millions of items in its collection tell a sweeping epic of courage, creativity and innovation and the stories of individuals of great renown



A question arose as to whether any convicts who had died while employed in the dockyard extension were interred there, as this apparently had a bearing on the disposal of the remains, but it was shown to the satisfaction of the Home Secretary that deceased convicts had been buried in Gillingham Churchyard.

Consent to the removal was given on 21 January, 1869, subject to all damage being made good. The admiralty, on 8 March, 1869, issued an order to remove the remains from Prisoners' Bank and to re-inter them in the existing French Cemetery, on St. Mary's Island. This Cemetery already contained the bodies of a 'large number' of prisoners, but no details are available as to their numbers or nationality.

On 11 May, 1869, the Chatham Dockyard authorities reported to the admiralty that 711 skeletons and some coffins had been removed from Gillingham Prisoners' Bank and re-interred in the French Cemetery at a total cost of £87 6s. At the same time isolated and scattered graves on St. Mary's Island were opened, and all remains were concentrated in the French cemetery.

In 1869 the Director of Works, by their Lordships' order, produced a design for a memorial which was approved to be built and erected in the French Cemetery, the work to be done by convict labour. In September of the same year a tender was accepted for a Sicilian marble figure for the memorial, but the figure was eventually made of some other material. The convicts erected and completed the work.

On 5 December, 1891, the charge of the French Cemetery on St. Mary's Island was taken over from the Dockyard by Captain Ernest Rice R.N., H.M.S. Pembroke, and the Admiralty having appropriated the annual sum of £10 for its maintenance, this sum was ordered to be paid to the Paymaster of the Depot Ship.

On 4 February 1903, in view of the contemplated construction of a new Dockyard Basin, which would take in the French Cemetery, Rear Admiral R.W. Craigie, the Admiral Superintendent and Senior Officer at Chatham, appointed a committee consisting of Captain R. Wintz, H.M.S. Pembroke, Chaplain the Rev. J.W. Moriaty, R.N., and Thomas Hunter, Esq., S.C.E., to report on the best procedure for transfer elsewhere from the French Cemetery all the remains, and to report on the best site in the Dockyard to erect the Memorial.

A grass site near the Staff Captain's Office, was selected, but was objected to by the Rear Admiral on the grounds that it would occasionally be flooded by the river. A site in Gillingham Old Cemetery was then proposed by the Committee, and the Vicar of Gillingham and the Rear Admiral concurred, but in March 1903, the Admiralty having desired that the remains and the memorial should be on Naval Ground, the Rear Admiral directed Captain Wintz to submit proposals for a suitable site in the then new Naval Barracks ground.

On 17 March 1904, the C.-in-C., Sir H. L. Pearson, the admiral-Supt. Rear Admiral R. W. Craigie, Captain Wintz, H.M.S. Pembroke, the S.C.E. and the French Naval Attache inspected the French Cemetery, visited the R.N. Barracks, and approved the present site, on the south side of St. George's Church as it was then. Admiralty letter D.W. 5095/4296, of 20th April, 1904, directed the removal of the remains and the re-erection of the memorial on this site.

The cost was made chargeable to the item, 'Chatham Dockyard Extension, under head (B) of the Naval Works Act, 1903.' The remains were exhumed and placed in deal varnished boxes, 6feet by 2½feet by 2feet, and as the Admiralty had directed that every care was to be taken that the work should be carried out decorously and without publicity, the Dockyard workmen employed in this task, worked in the evening after normal working hours. The transfer began in the evening of 25 August 1904, and on 16 September it was reported that 521 skulls and remains had been reburied in 29 boxes in the Royal Naval Barracks site.

The re-erection of the memorial then began, and under date 7 December 1904, the C.-in-C. reported to the Admiralty that the work was completed. The total cost of the transfer was £645.

On 24 January 1905, their Lordships wrote in reply, 'It is considered best not to have a public ceremony for the unveiling of the monument.' In addition to the French prisoners of war, it is possible that some Dutch prisoners, taken in the battle of Camperdown, 11 October 1797, may have died and been buried on the Medway banks, but no records in confirmation can be found. It is improbable that there are any prisoners' remains dating from the three Dutch wars in 1652-1654, 1664-1667, and 1672-1674.

The memorial bears the following inscription:

'Here are gathered together the remains of many brave soldiers and sailors, who having once been foes, afterwards the captives of England, now find rest in her soil. Remembering no more the animosities of war, or the sorrows of imprisonment, they were deprived of the consolation of closing their eyes amongst the countrymen they loved. But they have been laid in an honourable grave by a nation who knows how to respect valour and to sympathise with misfortune.'

On the memorial tablet appears:

'This memorial, built to Admiralty order by convict labour in 1869, and placed in the prisoners of war cemetery on St. Mary's Island, was re-erected here in the autumn of 1904, when a contemplated, but subsequently abandoned, extension of Chatham Dockyard, necessitated the removal of the prisoners to their new grave beneath it.' (<http://www.kenthistoryforum.co.uk/index.php?topic=12617.0>)

So now you know. I had the privilege of being the Mayor of Medway in 2004 when I attended the service for the first time. I have attended nearly every year since. It is a short but very moving ceremony, when the Mayor and French dignitaries, and others, lay wreaths. Members of the public are welcome. If you should wish to attend please contact the mayor's PA at mayor@medway.gov.uk

A photograph of the memorial can be seen on page 2.

31 March, 2.00 m – 4.00 pm

French Hospital, Museum Tour and Talk.

Take a tour of the Huguenot Museum and French Hospital with the Museum's trustee Peter Duval and hear about his family's Huguenot story.

6 and 7 April, 10.30 am – 3.30 pm

Stained Glass Windows.

Make your own stained glass paper window during the Easter holidays and take part in our Easter themed gallery trail. Sessions at 10:30am, 12:30pm and 2:30pm; £3.00.

Family Events

The Saturday Club.

10.00am – 12.00 noon; £4 per child or £35 per year.

Do you like getting messy and having fun? Come along to the Saturday Club to take part in different arts and crafts on the first Saturday of each month; 8+ years. In March we are getting crafty making finger puppets and in April we are getting messy with tie dye! Booking is essential - see below.

Children's Cinema: French Film Club

Join us for morning screenings (10.00am – 12.00pm) of classic children's films with a French twist. Bring your own food and drink and don't worry about the noise! £3 per person. To book visit www.rochesterfilmsociety.co.uk

Huguenot Museum: Story Time

Bring your under 5s along every Thursday morning to have fun with props and games as we bring a different story to life each week. From Room on the Broom to Owl Babies and the Very Hungry Caterpillar. Baby change facilities, toys and play mats available- and even tea for the grown-ups. **Pick up a loyalty card and get the 5th and 10th sessions free.** See our website (www.huguenotmuseum.org) for a full story list. £2.00 per child, 50p per additional child, adults free. No need to book, just turn up!

The Huguenot Museum is open Wednesday – Saturday 10am – 5pm on the top two floors of 95 High Street, Rochester, Kent. Entrance is £4 for adults and £3 concessions and can be validated for 12 months with gift-aid. For more information or to get in touch visit www.huguenotmuseum.org, call 01634 789347 or email learning@huguenotmuseum.org Unless otherwise indicated, for all booking call 01634 789347.

Friends of Broomhill

Broomhill Park has been awarded a sixth consecutive Green Flag; the Award recognises the best green spaces in the country. The Park has again been awarded 'Outstanding' in the RHS S.E in Bloom competition.



We offer talks to interested bodies, and organise occasional events to which the public are invited. For more information contact Richard Bourne (Chairman); 31 Usher Park Road, Haxby, York YO32 3RX; 01904 766375, or 07771 831653. Email Richard@thebournes.me.uk. Or see our website at www.chathamtraction.org.uk.

The City of Rochester Society

'The City of Rochester Society was founded in 1967 to help conserve the historic City as a pleasant place to visit. The Society is still active today, helping to improve the environment and quality of life in Rochester for residents and visitors alike.' Taken from the City of Rochester Society website, www.city-of-rochester.org.uk, where further information on the society and how to join is available.

All talks are at The Moat House, 8 Crow Lane, Rochester, ME1 1RF. See the website for further details. There is a small charge for events to defray expenses; please contact the CoRS Secretary, Christine Furminger on 01634 320598 or at cafurminger@blueyonder.co.uk for further information and how to join.

See Rochester's wealth of historic buildings and hear about the City's long and fascinating history from an enthusiastic and knowledgeable guide of the City of Rochester Society! Every Saturday, Sunday, Wednesday and Public Holiday from Good Friday until the end of October. Starting at 2.15 p.m. from The Visitors Centre, High Street, Rochester. The tours are free of charge, but donations to Society funds are always gratefully received.

HUGUENOT MUSEUM

discover your story

Huguenot Museum Main Events

18 March, 10.00-1.00 pm.
Watercolour Workshop.
Join local artist Jackie Trinder to create Huguenot themed flowing watercolours; £30.

24 March, 2.00 – 4.00 pm
Tracing Your Huguenot Ancestors
A talk by Dr Kathy Chater.
Dr Kathy Chater returns to the Huguenot Museum for this insightful talk on how to trace your Huguenot ancestry. Find out how to start researching your own family history to discover if you too might be a Huguenot descendant! £10.

25 March, 2.00 – 4.00 pm
Elizabethan Music Recital
Join us at the Museum for an afternoon recital of Elizabethan virginals music from the 16th and 17th century. FREE with normal Museum admission.

St Margaret's Parish Poor-House, Rochester

Betty Cole



Betty Cole is FOMA's Membership Secretary. She is interested in local and family history and holds a Certificate in Theory and Practice of Local History with the University of Kent at Canterbury. Betty is a volunteer transcriber and checker for free-to-access internet sites for the researching of census and parish records.

Part 1

St Margaret's Parish was one of the two parishes in Rochester, Kent. Its parish poor-house, built in 1724 near the parish church in St. Margaret's Street for the accommodation of 30 paupers, is still in use today as part of the Kings School. It is the only former parish poor-house building still surviving in the Medway Towns. By the time Wright's *Topography of Rochester, Chatham, Strood and Brompton* was published in 1838 it was already closed: '... the paupers of St. Margaret' Parish being maintained at the workhouse of St Nicholas and Chatham, under control of the Guardians of the Medway Union.'

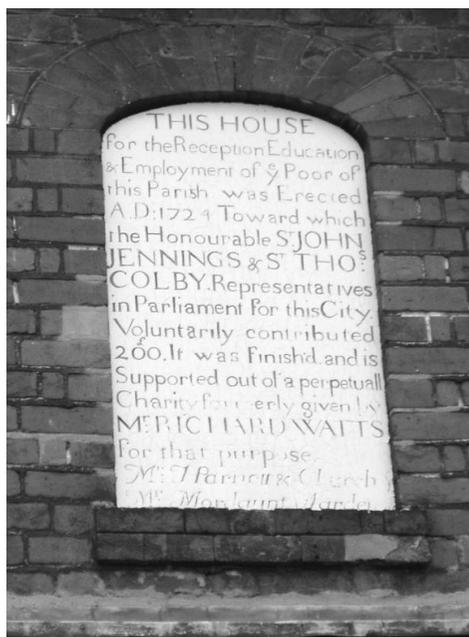


The building (pictured) is a long fronted, neat brick structure of two storeys with a third floor in the roof space where dormer windows allow in the light. Above the large central door can be seen the original dedication plaque (pictured) acknowledging the donation of £200 towards its erection by two Rochester Members of Parliament, Sir John Jennings and Sir Thomas Colby, and donations from the Richard Watts Charity for the finishing of the building and its support.

It was not uncommon for a parish to receive support from Charities to build and maintain

their poor-houses although primarily the money was raised from the Parish poor rate collection. The rate payers of St. Margaret's Parish were paying one shilling in the £ in May 1816, eighteen pence in the £ in October 1818. It then returned to one shilling in May 1819 and rose again to one shilling and sixpence by March 1820 according to notes in the Vestry Order Book.¹

There is evidence that the building was well maintained during its service as the parish poor-house. Among documents at the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre is a contract dated April 1823 for new privies to be built. The specification is very detailed and shows a care to have a certain standard maintained despite the use of the resultant building. The appointed builder is to 'cleanse out the old privys [sic] and cart away and dispose of the soil ...'. They are then to be 'well rim'd with the chalk or gravel dug out of the new vaults.' Any bricks used from the old privies were to be cleaned before re-use. The walls were to be lime washed two coats and 'the carpenter is to be instructed to use new oak not old oak' in constructing the doorcases. The contract concludes, 'the whole of the sundry works to be done in as good, substantial, sound, workmanlike manner for the sum of ...' but the amount has not been filled in.²



The plaque

There are several other documents in the archives relating to further building work including plans for an extension in 1827. It is not certain whether this work was ever undertaken but there were times when the poor-house was in need of further accommodation. On 29 January 1818 an item in the *Vestry Order Book* notes 'ordered that Mr Fry be paid 5s per week for a room for the surplus poor of the House to commence September 1st 1817.' John Fry was an overseer nominated by the parish. However, there were times when the opposite was the case. A report dated 29 March 1821 states, 'Your select Vestry have to remark on the comparatively small number of poor in the house considering the distressed state of the labouring class at the present time and to call your attention to the greater relief in consequence to out-resident poor having upon the [??] consideration, been convinced that affording relief to poor housekeepers in time of distress, tended more to cherish that moral state of independence and industrious exertion than breaking up their house keeping and taking them into the poor-house – which latter system they consider calculated to destroy the best feelings of the human mind.'

I could find only one source which reveals the number of inmates accommodated in the House. This gave the average number of inmates from April 1826 to April 1827 as 48 and ¾ and the cost of keeping them 3/10d per head. It does not say if this is per week or for how

Work to restore one of Rochester's most treasured landmarks resumed in spring, 2016. The £2 million Heritage Lottery Funded project to conserve Eastgate House was paused in July 2015 due to the voluntary administration of the main contractor, Fairhurst Ward Abbots. Medway Council awarded completion of the project to construction company Buxton Building Contractors Limited. Founded in 1924, Buxton has vast experience working with historic and listed buildings, and has also worked on the Heritage Lottery Funded *Hidden Treasures, Fresh Expressions* project at Rochester Cathedral.

Further information can be obtained at: www.friendsof-eastgatehouse.org on Facebook on www.facebook.com/eastgatehouse and on Twitter <https://twitter.com/EastgateHouse>. To join the Friends of Eastgate House, please contact Terri Zbyszewska, The Membership Secretary, FoEH, 31 The Esplanade, Rochester, ME1 1QW or at tzbyszewska@yahoo.co.uk; a copy of the membership form is also available on the website.

The Friends of the Guildhall Museums

www.friendsoftheguildhall.com

The Friends of the Guildhall Museums is a group which supports the work of two important but very different elements of Medway's heritage - the Guildhall Museum in Rochester and the Old Brook Pumping Station in Chatham. Supporting the Guildhall Museums will help conserve our local history for generations to come through specialist events and opportunities designed to educate and inspire, telling the stories of the Medway Towns. **For all events see www.friendsoftheguildhall.com/events/**



The Friends were constituted in 2007, with aims centred on the restoration of the sole surviving Chatham Traction bus, GKE 68 of 1939. The Chatham & District Traction Company had operated bus services over Medway's former tram routes from 1930 to 1955, when it was absorbed into Maidstone & District. The bus, a once-familiar piece of Medway's fabric, is to come alive again as a resource for the study of local and social history.

Buses were central to life in the Towns for many decades, taking people to school, shops, work or play. Studies might look inward to the company's people and facilities, or outward to its services and locations served, and how lifestyle changes influenced its development.

To support the educational aim we are collecting relevant material to form an archive of local transport history, including an oral history collection. We would be happy to receive any items – photographs, artefacts, ephemera – relating to Chatham Traction, its predecessor trams or local bus operations up to 1970 (the year of withdrawal of the last Chatham Traction vehicle).

Grants from the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Rochester Bridge Trust have allowed completion of two fundamental stages – the reconstruction of the body structure and overhaul of the engine. We are now seeking further funding to complete the restoration and to prepare our organisation for its educational role.

News and Events

Calendar of Forthcoming Events and Exhibitions

Friends of Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre

Talks

14 March, 7.30 pm,
A Rat's Tale
A talk by Rob Flood.

25 March, 2.00 – 6.00 pm,

FOMA Celebration

The Copper Rivet Distillery

Leviathan Way, Chatham Dockyard, ME4 4LP.

SEE BACK PAGE/PAGE 5 FOR DETAILS.

11 April, 7.00 for 7.30 pm,

FOMA AGM

Full details in the AGM insert included in this issue.

22 April, 7.30 pm

Quiz Night

£8 for members and non-members. **BOOKING REQUIRED** (see below).

Please do your best to get a table of friends together!

Booking is not required for FOMA talks. Until further notice all events are at Frindsbury Parish Hall, Church Green, ME2 4HE. Talks are £3 for members, £5 non-members. Booking for Quiz Nights and enquiries through the FOMA Secretary: Odette Buchanan, 72 Jersey Rd, Strood, ME2 3PE; odette_buchanan@yahoo.co.uk; 01634 718231.

Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre

The Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre will be closed from 5 pm, Friday 3 March until 9 am, Tuesday 2 May 2017.

Until further notice, our postal address is Medway Archives Office, c/o Medway Council, Gun Wharf, Dock Road, Chatham, Kent, ME4 4TR.

Eastgate House

Eastgate House is one of Rochester's landmarks. Built in the 1590s by Sir Peter Buck, the most senior member of staff at Chatham Dockyard, its structure has been adapted considerably over the years, but research has indicated that the original building may be Medieval or earlier. A Heritage Lottery Grant awarded in January 2011 has enabled Medway Council to begin planning conservation work on the house and to start opening its doors once more to visitors.

long. They have arrived at this cost by adding together the bills for meat, bread (the largest amount), flour, groceries, coals, milk, malt and hops, shaving, wearing apparel and an amount of £37 18s 5d headed 'missing bills.' There is also some costing headed 'Casual Maintenance' which only allowing 'mere necessities' comes to 2/8 ½ d a head. The number of these casual recipients of relief the same year is given as a total figure of 1,112.³

The largest expense for the poor-house was probably in feeding the *family*. Food was very plain and the basic ingredients for the meal such as bread, meat and flour were bought from local suppliers. A receipt book in the archives shows the regular delivery of bread, measured by the gallon, and flour measured by the bushel, being received from various suppliers from 1818 to 1819. When the receipts start in April 1818, bread is 1s 9d a gallon, dropping to 1s 3¼d in October 1818 and then rising again from 1819. At the bottom of many of the receipts is a note saying that the delivery is '8ozs. Short' or '12ozs. Short'.⁴

It may be that the suppliers were not the only ones to try to make a little for themselves on the side. In November 1818 the Vestry held a meeting to discuss charges made against the Master and Mistress of the poor-house. One of the charges made is 'For frequently allowing the bread delivered in by the contractor to be exchanged for other bread; for suffering flour, leather and faggots to be taken from the premises and not accounting for the same ...' and '... for allowing the meat, bread and butter and other provisions to be carried out of the house; and for making sausages of and otherwise consuming the meat etc. among his own family, which was provided for general consumption in the house.'

The House was also fairly well equipped for cooking, laundry, cleaning and most tasks required to be carried out in day to day living. A list of tools amongst the archives includes, 'night stools, scrubbing brush, iron saucepan, tea kettle, beer can, tin dishes, cullender, [sic] trenchers, ladle, iron skimmer, dripping pan stand, carvers, fork (carving), knives, forks (in use), knives and forks (new), porringers, spoons, large spoons, chipper, pairs of scales, weights, milk pale, knifebox, pudding cloths, butter cloth, pair steps, chopping board, bread baskets, shovel, hop basket, cooler, clothes horse, clothes basket, water butts, yard bucket, stool, chopping block, pig troughs, wooden scoops, grind stone, garden line, spades, dung fork, coffin, wheelbarrow, curtain rods ...' At the bottom of this document is a list of some of the rooms within the building, 'Shoemakers Room, Front Yard, Cellar, Kitchen, Oakum Room, Hall, Pantry, Washing House and Capes Room.' Other inventories mention further rooms: Back Garrett, Atwaters Room, Long Garrett, Lying in Room, Nursery, Working Room, Woman's room and Men's Room.

An inventory of bedding taken October 1822 lists the number of beds and bedding against the names of inmates:

' No.8 womans [sic] Room		
Capes Room	Mrs Thomson	1
No.9 Womans Room	Mrs Harris	1
No.10 Do	Mrs Lane	1
No.11 Do	Mrs Higgins	1
No.12 Do	(illegible)	1
No.13 Girls [sic] Room	Shipman	1
No.14 Mens [sic]Room	Latter	1
No.15 Do	Moore	1
No.16 Do		
No.17 Do	Girls	1'

The list continues listing a total of 26 names. As the poor-house was built for 30 paupers this may have been the total number of inmates at that time and according to the list they did not share beds. The list of bedding also includes feather bolsters, flock bolsters and flock pillows. The sleeping accommodation appears to have been divided into several rooms and gives the impression of being quite acceptable when in many homes at this time, children were sleeping top to toe, four in a bed and their parents on a makeshift bed in the living area.⁵

Given the number of rooms mentioned above and the size of the building we can see that a not very large space was used for a great many purposes and even with the *family* only numbering about 30 it would have been quite cramped. Although not a forbidding place in the present day, it may still have been regarded with some dread by those who had no choice but to enter. Although there would have been inmates who were orphans and parents whose children had died, there are several documents which show family members living together there. In the list of shoe repairs, mentioned later, there are three members of the Swineas family and four members of the Shipman family are listed in the Bedding Inventory. After the Poor Law Amendment Act came into force in 1834 and the start of the new Union Workhouses it became customary to separate families.

Apart from accommodating the sick and the old; the parish officials were required to find work within the poor-house for the able-bodied. St Margaret's tried several initiatives to find work for their able-bodied. In March 1817 a note in the Vestry Order Book says, 'That the thanks of this Vestry be most respectfully offered to the Right Rev. the Lord Bishop of this Diocese for his kindness and liberality in permitting certain changes to be made in the fences of his Lordship's estates, by which employment was given to the poor and the public accommodation was improved.....That the thanks of this Vestry be most respectfully offered to the Honourable Board of Ordnance for their kindness in granting tools for the employment of the poor.'

On 29 March 1821 a report in the same book says, 'As the Winter advanced the numerous applications of the unemployed poor for assistance caused your select vestry to take into their most serious consideration the best means of providing them with employment – and it was determined to hire a piece of woodland for the purpose of Grubbing it, paying them at the rate of 1s 6d a rod for the labour of Grubbing with the intention of planting the land when cleared with potatoes for the use of the poor house.' Some of this work may have been given to the out-poor of the parish as we have seen from a previous entry that the officers of St Margaret's parish were sympathetic to the idea of providing relief to those able, with some assistance, to remain out of the House. However, the following shows this was done only after due consideration, 'Your select vestry in granting relief to the poor who are not maintained within the poor-house have been particularly careful to discriminate between the necessitous and the idle and profligate.'

In the Medway area, because of the close vicinity of the ever expanding Dock Yard, there had been for some time the opportunity to take in work picking oakum. The earliest reference to be found in the documents I was able to look at show that this work was being done in 1816 when the accounts of disbursements of the overseers John Homan and Edward Wood show 'Apr.8 Paid Tuffey for oakum 5s 0d. ... Jun.26 Paid Hammond carriage of Junk and oakum 16s 0d ... Jun. 27 Paid Wilson for picking oakum 2s 6d.'⁶

By March 1821 this needed supply of work seems to have dried up and the Vestry were induced to write to Sir Robert Barlow, the Commissioner of His Majesty's Dock Yard

Readers' Letters

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

Philemon Ewer

11 January 2017

Dear Amanda.

I have read *The Clock Tower* and I was particularly [interested in] the article on the Trade Tokens ['A Token in Time' by Catharina Clement, see *The Clock Tower*, Issues 25 and 28, February and November 2012). I have been doing research on Philemon Ewer of Strood and you confirmed my belief that his tokens were probably issued by father and son. I also could not determine what his trade was until the article said he was a tailor.

We are planning to come to Strood this spring this year and see what else I can learn about my family history. I have traced my tree to Philemon Ewer who died in 1730 in Bursledon and is said to be from and buried in Strood, his home town. St. Nicholas Church I believe but this is not confirmed. I am going to be looking for any information as to where the families lived and possibly see any family plots if any are still available.

My grandfather started looking at our family history in the 60s and I inherited the paperwork he had collected including a copy of the Death Warrant of Charles 1 in 1649. One of my ancestors signed the warrant. I cannot authenticate this but everything points to the fact he was an uncle. I have the family bible dated 1817 to Charles Ewer and it is recorded to be a direct descendant. This appears to be just folk lore I believe. But all this information brought me to look into what I could prove by using the internet. The family history in the bible goes back to 1500s.

Any how I was hoping that you or the Medway could help me in some way to locate the church where the family may be buried and in which sections of Strood I should be looking. I would appreciate any help that you or the group could provide.

I am just finishing up a book on the *A History of Strood Rural District* by Brian Matthews and I hope to pick up the *History of Strood* by H. Smetham, but I could not get it shipped to Canada.

Anyhow, I hope to hear from you and that you or the Medway Group can help me in some way.

David & Miriam Ewer,
Ontario, Canada.

Do you have any information? Please let Editor, Amanda Thomas know (see contact details above).

At the Huguenot Museum we are expanding our family history research offer and we are looking for volunteers who are interested in helping with family research! The Museum holds regular volunteer activities and meetings, which have included trips to London and Canterbury, so there's much more to volunteering than you think. If you would be interested in helping us assist visitors with their research then give the Museum a call on 01634 789347, email: info@huguenotmuseum.org or drop by the Museum for a chat!

For further details see page 40. All events can be booked by telephone, on the Museum's website or in person. Visit www.huguenotmuseum.org

Membership Reminder

In this issue the AGM booklet includes your FOMA Membership Reminder.
Please bring this with you to the AGM to renew your membership.

You can also pay on the FOMA website <http://foma-lsc.org/membership.html>, by Standing Order and by post.

Please contact: FOMA Membership Secretary, Mrs. B. Cole, 98 The Wharf, Dock Head Road, Chatham ME4 4ZS, Kent.

Queries can also be sent by email to Betty Cole at: betty-cole@outlook.com

**N.B. Betty saves stamps from all correspondence which are sent to raise funds for
The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association.**

requesting 'that he would allow a portion of the Junk (sic) issued to the Parishes of Chatham and Gillingham as there are many persons employed in the Dock Yard residing in the parish of St Margaret.' The Vestry reported that 'An answer was received that from the greater number of persons belonging to the Dock Yard residing in the Parishes of Chatham and Gillingham and from the consumption of oakum being much reduced it would not be worth the attention of three parishes were it divided amongst them'⁷

Apart from work which could be obtained from the outside world there seems to have been plenty to do within the poor-house in catering for the needs of the *family*. Among the list of rooms mentioned was the 'Shoemakers' [sic] room. In a Clothing Book in the archives an entry dated 1804 lists, 'Shoes done by Lomas.' On 28 April 'New shoes for An More, Eliz. Swineas at 4s; Shoes 'sold and heald [sic]' for Jane Osboun and Sarah Smith at 1s 9d each. May 2 same for James Darling but now at a cost of 2s 6d. May 11 'New shoes for Mr Swineas and Sarah Swineas (no price); May 13 'sold and heald' for Mrs. Foster at 1s 9d and new shoes for Eliz. Simmons and Mrs Darling together 4s.6d. The list continues up to an entry of July 5 and ends with 'Paid by Mr. Chilley 5L.'⁸ The document has some edges missing hence some missing prices.

Mr. Chilley's name appears from time to time in many of the accounts. It will often say 'sent in by Mr. Chilley.' It is therefore not clear whether Lomas is an inmate who is doing repair work and making new shoes for outsiders which would account for Mr Chilley paying the £5 to the poor-house. However some of the names on the list for whom the repairs are done appear on other lists as inmates. It may be that Lomas is an outsider, a local boot maker, doing the repairs for the House but then we know they had a Shoemaker's Room and it would make sense to earn money by doing repairs for the outside community if he were an inmate.

In the next issue of *The Clock Tower* (Issue 46, May 2017) I will document the contribution made by the women in the House again illustrating the vast amount of information that can be found at the Medway Archive and Local Studies Centre.

Notes

1. Medway Local Studies Centre Archive ref. P305/8/2, *Vestry Order Book*.
2. Archive ref. P305/18B/2, Specification for building work.
3. Archive ref. P305/18/12, Document showing number of poor in the house.
4. Archive ref. P305/12/19, *Receipt Book*.
5. P305/18/11, *Inventory of Bedding*.
6. Ref. 305/12/5, *Summary Accounts*.
7. *Vestry Order Book*, P305/8/2.
8. *Clothing Book*, P305/12/11.

Photographs by Betty Cole.

Rinkomania – The Story of Chatham United Service Skating Rink

Helen Worthy



Helen is an Archives and Local Studies Assistant at MALSC, working mainly on the desk. After completing her degree in Classical Civilisation, she worked at the British Museum for eleven years. She then studied for her Postgraduate Certificate in Education and taught at North-West Kent College and Medway Adult and Community Learning Service, before leaving to teach school groups at Chatham's Historic Dockyard and work as a teaching assistant.

In the 1870s, a new craze swept through Britain. In towns and cities across the country roller skating rinks were constructed, and a new word entered the English language, namely *rinkomania!*

In 1876, Professor John Gamgee was making headlines creating his 'Glaciarium' at the Old Clock House in Chelsea. This state-of-the-art ice rink was constructed using the latest technology which was able to produce artificial cold to preserve meat. The ice rink was an ambitious project, involving laying pipes on the floor of the rink, and flooding the rink to a depth of two or three inches. The resultant sheet of ice was 'a perfect sheet of ice, which was delightful to the skaters... and on which Mr Gamgee would guarantee equally good skating even under a Bombay sun'.¹

Much simpler and cheaper, of course, was to construct a roller skating rink. In the same year that Professor Gamgee was embarking on his ice rink, plans were afoot in the Medway Towns for the creation of at least three roller skating rinks. *The South East Gazette* reported in March 1876 that plans to convert the floor of the Corn Exchange in Rochester into a skating rink had unfortunately been abandoned, but work on a skating rink on the floor of the military gymnasium in Brompton was underway. The floor in Brompton was being covered with 'asphalte' by a large number of convicts, one of whom – William Squires – escaped in thick fog in February 1876 only to be re-captured four hours later at 'Snodledge Bottom'.² Chatham was also to have a roller skating rink. Situated on land adjoining St John's Church, the entrance was from the New Road, close to St John's Schools. Writing in 1930, Edwin Harris describes the rink being situated in a meadow at the back of Railway Street, where fairs had previously been held.

Huguenot Museum Update

Amy Dimmock



Amy Dimmock is the Learning and Community Engagement Officer at the Huguenot Museum, Rochester. Amy studied Classics and Archaeology at the University of Kent before completing her Museum Studies MA at Leicester University. She returned to Kent to begin her museum career as Assistant Curator at The Royal Engineers Museum in Brompton. Amy is passionate about history and crafting and is excited to be a part of the Huguenot Museum team!

There have been quite a few changes at the Huguenot Museum over the last few months. Our new Director, Dinah Winch, started in November 2016 replacing Emily Fuggle who left us to move to New York City, USA. Vikki Hoggins, our visitor services officer, is on maternity leave having added a new baby girl to her family, and Hannah Mason has joined us as maternity cover.

The Huguenot Museum has a jam-packed events calendar for 2017 with lots to interest everyone in the family! Our adults craft bench workshops kick off with an Introduction to Screen Printing course with local artist Rachel Moore in February which runs for three Saturdays and can be booked either as a three-part course or as individual workshops. Jackie Trinder returns to the Museum on 18 March for a Watercolour Workshop, 10:15-12:45pm at £30.00 a ticket with materials and refreshments included. On 22 April the Museum will also be welcoming back Cas Holmes for 'Stitch: Small Objects of Desire' workshop where participants will take inspiration from everyday items to create stitched and stencilled nature stories on canvas. Dr Kathy Chater is back by popular demand at the Museum on 24 March to talk on 'Tracing Your Huguenot Ancestors'.

The Museum and French Hospital are teaming up this year for a number of exciting tours and talks, the first of which will be a tour and talk of the French Hospital and Museum by Peter Duval on 31 March. Attendees will have an exclusive tour of the French Hospital and hear all about Peter's Huguenot story. Spaces for this talk are limited so booking is essential, and there may be access issues when touring the French Hospital, so if you have any concerns do phone the Museum on 01634 789347. This year the Museum will be trying something new with an Elizabethan music recital on the afternoon of 25 March which is free with the normal museum admission.

There are lots of family activities coming up at the Huguenot Museum, including the return of Story Time every term time Thursday. The Museum also offers a loyalty card for regular visitors which entitles them to attend the fifth and tenth sessions for free. Each week we read stories, have colouring sheets, toys and refreshments for grown-ups and children! During half term the Museum is also running children's activities on 18 and 19 February. The Saturday Club also starts up again in February.

Archives Update

The New Medway History Centre - Spring 2017

Alison Cable, Archivist



MALSC will finally be moving to new premises in Spring 2017. A move was mooted some years ago when it was becoming clear that the archive strong room (see page 47) was running out of space. Then in 2009, we were advised by the National Archives that our building would not meet the required standards for archive storage for much longer. This enabled us to press ahead with planning the move, which also coincided with Medway Council's need to clear the present site. At the time of writing in February 2017, it is quite possible that the Centre will be rechristened with a slightly snappier name but nothing has been decided just yet. The FOMA committee has been consulted on this matter.

The vacant Strood Library building on Bryant Road was selected as our new home. We will, for the first time, have a separate local studies search room and climate-controlled archive viewing room. This will improve security for archive collections when in use, and also (we hope) create a quieter space for archive researchers. The building will have a large entrance area where customers can view exhibitions and there will be seating areas and facilities for service users in the reconfigured reception space.

The project is currently on schedule for its Spring opening. The installation of the bespoke archive racking (over 2,400 linear metres) in the archive strong room will take place during February 2017 which will allow time for the environmental conditions to equalise to enable the historic collections to be moved from late March.

When we close the old Archives at the start of March, we will be concentrating on packing the local studies collections, and preparing transfer lists for the move from A to B. Our relocation will be managed by a contracted office removals company but the methodology will need to be worked out by senior staff at MALSC. This is all going to be incredibly hard work for the team but we are excited about our new office space and are looking forward to planning our outreach and events programmes for late 2017/2018.

Our 'soft launch' will take place at the start of May and this means we will open according to our normal office hours. It will be interesting to see who is first through the doors!

Our VIP launch is likely to take place in the early summer but is still being planned. Please keep an eye on our archive and local studies webpages at: www.medway.gov.uk/archives and our Facebook page (www.facebook.com/medwayarchives).

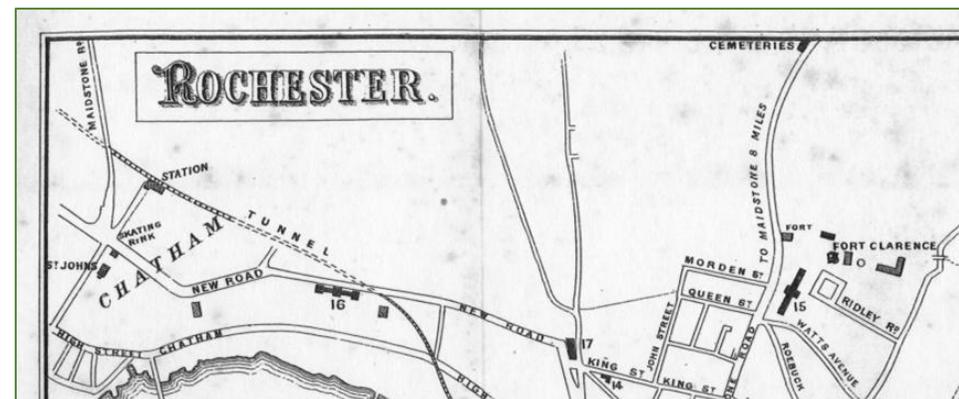


Illustration from *The Visitors' Guide to Rochester, Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre, C080554670, 1885.*

Work began on the Chatham United Service Skating Rink in March 1876. A bank near the New Road viaduct was cut away, and just two months later the skating rink was opened to the public, 'one of the best constructed rinks in the kingdom.'³ Unlike the asphalt floor at Brompton, or the marble skating rink on Clapham Road in London (more durable than asphalt but at double the cost), the rink at Chatham had a concrete floor made from 'Glaskin's Patent'⁴ invented by the contractor Mr Glaskin who had previously made the skating rink at Croydon.

When the rink finally opened on 13 May 1876, the *Chatham Observer* published a long account of the celebrations, together with a detailed and enthusiastic description of the site: 'There are some pleasant little walks provided for those who do not like to indulge in the sport ... A croquet lawn and lawn tennis ground are being laid out ... A refreshment buffet has been erected in the most rural of styles. The buffet altogether has almost a fairy-like appearance. The windows are of bright stained glass, of different colours, and when the sun shines upon them, a reflection almost like a rainbow in its hues is cast upon the walls and the flowers and ferns which are planted behind the burrs, the result being that we not only get scarlet geraniums, &c., but that we also have them blue and green and other colours ... The grounds have been lighted by numerous gas jets, suspended in large glass globes, the effect being – as an authority said on Saturday – of giving the grounds the appearance of old Vauxhall Gardens on a small scale...'

Contrast this with the rather less-idyllic description of the skating rink written by Edwin Harris in 1930: 'The rink premises consisted of a large high-pitched rectangular wooden shed with a cement floor.'⁵ In fine weather, he adds, the wooden gates on the west end of the shed were opened to allow skaters to exit the building, skate along the 'serpentine cement walks' and re-enter the building by another entrance.

The new skating rink generated a great deal of interest. Much was made of the fashionable gathering of the towns' *elite* at the rink. Invitations for the official opening had been sent out to 'officers of the Garrison and the Dockyard, and to leading inhabitants of the towns.'⁶

On the very day that the rink opened, there was a tragic accident. Barling Bonner, a 78-year old man, and a widowed carpenter, was seen standing on the back of a brougham carriage outside the rink. With one foot on a spoke of a wheel, and the other foot on the spring at the back of the carriage, he was endeavouring to see over the fence in to the skating rink. Unfortunately the carriage driver, unaware of the elderly man, drove off and Barling Bonner suffered severe injuries to his leg and head. Although taken to hospital, he died the following morning of his injuries: 'There was a fatal accident to an old man whilst he was looking over the fence ...' the correspondent in the *Chatham News* reported, 'but that occurred from his incautious curiosity.'⁷

Quite why skating became so fashionable isn't clear. Promoted in advertisements as healthy exercise, nevertheless the prospect of men and women socialising together and, when skating, escaping the close attention of moralising elders was perhaps part of the attraction. Certainly there were measures in place to ensure that the Chatham rink was seen as a respectable venue. Advertisements clearly state that, in order to maintain the respectability of the new rink, the manager retained the right to refuse entry to any person.

Any concerns that the rink might attract a disreputable element were firmly quashed by the *Chatham News* on Saturday 20 May 1876. With some glee, perhaps, the report of the official opening of the rink includes the following: 'There were also present several clergymen of various denominations, and we also espied a gentleman – a leading member of the Medway Board of Guardians and the Chatham Local Board – who had condemned the making of the "rink" – upon moral grounds – when the matter was before the Local Board, but who on Saturday - having so far relaxed in his previous opinion – after seeing that there could not be anything immoral in it, said in our hearing that he saw no harm in it provided it was conducted properly.'

The land was actually leased to the skating rink company by the Reverend Stevens of St John's Church, and in September 1876 he did not oppose the application for a licence to sell wine and spirits at the rink. Supporters of the application pointed out that the rink was 'patronised by a most respectable class of society.' Indeed, the only person to object appears to have been Mr Samson Burford, landlord of the Gibraltar Tavern, who was clearly concerned that it might adversely affect his trade. In any event, the licence was granted, as long as only customers frequenting the rink were served.⁸

Entertainment was varied. As well as military bands, touring acts such as Raslus, Champion Flying Artiste of the World were common. The surface of the rink clearly lent itself to bicycling acts, and Stirk and Zalto appeared in 1879 (Monsieur Stirk 'is the only Artist in the world who balances a Bicycle on the Aerial Ladder.') Monsieur Albin also made several appearances: 'Iron Horse Champion and Juggler, who will give a marvellous performance on his MONSTER BICYCLE which has a driving wheel of 8 feet in diameter.'

The Duke of Gloucester visited Rochester Cathedral in June 1979 for the *Design for Service* Exhibition. The Princess Royal has visited the area on several occasions. As Chief Commandant of the WRNS she was at Chatham Naval Base in June 1980. As Patron of the Motor Neurone Association the Duchess of York visited the Molly Wisdom Hospice on 19 July 1999.

The Duchess of Kent, Patron of the Friends of Rochester Cathedral, has visited the cathedral on several occasions. On 17 March 1994 she toured the cathedral, met members of the staff and attended a private lunch at the Deanery. After lunch H.R.H. returned to the cathedral to meet members of the Friends and an introduction to the 2000 Trust Appeal at an informal reception in the crypt.

The Duke of Kent was in Rochester on 27 June 1994 at the opening of the refurbished Guildhall Museum and at Upnor to open the climbing wall at the Arethusa Venture Centre. The refurbishment of the museum cost £837,000 and within six months had boosted visitor figures by 70 per cent. The Duke unveiled a plaque commemorating the visit, received a bronze cast of the medieval city seal and signed the visitors' book. Accompanied by the Lord Lieutenant and the Mayor, Mrs Ann Marsh, he was given a tour of the museum by the Curator Michael Moad, during which the Duke remarked on the heaviness of the mayoral chains.¹² In the afternoon the Duke's party visited Upnor Venture Centre where they saw a group of young assailers, including some from the Kent Disabled Club in wheelchairs, scale the 23-foot wall. The Duke however scaled the wall in a lift. At the top he unveiled a plaque but not before a climber had retrieved the forgotten scissors from the ground, in order for him to cut the tape and declare the wall open.¹³

Notes

1. Official Programme.
2. Official Programme.
3. Rochester Cathedral Library, Archdeacon Harland's Scrapbook: Souvenir Programme.
4. *Rochester, Chatham and Gillingham News*.
5. *Rochester, Chatham and Gillingham News*.
6. Official Programme.
7. Rochester flan contained golden peaches and red cherries incorporating the city colours arranged in the form of a crest.
8. *Rochester, Chatham and Gillingham News*.
9. *Rochester, Chatham and Gillingham News*.
10. Nigel Yates and James Gibson: *Rochester Bridge*.
11. *Rochester, Chatham and Gillingham News*.
12. *Medway Standard*, Tuesday 28 June 1994.
13. *Medway Standard*, Tuesday 28 June 1994.

Turtle Soup or Smoked Salmon
 Roast ribs of English Beef
 Yorkshire pudding
 New Potatoes Garden Peas
 Brussels Sprouts
 Rochester Flan⁷
 Petit fours and coffee

After the lunch the Queen and Duke drove to Rochester Castle where the Queen addressed a large crowd before being presented with a specially bound copy of Rochester's Charters by Philip Bartlett the Town Clerk.

On 21 October 1984 the Queen and Prince Philip made a whistle stop tour of the Medway Towns.⁸ Their first stop was the Molly Wisdom hospice in St William's Way, Rochester where the Queen unveiled a plaque. The royal party moved on to the Corn Exchange in Rochester High Street where the Queen and Prince Philip signed the Customal before sitting down to 'a banquet'. Lunch was followed by a walkabout in the High Street where the Queen unveiled a plaque on Chertsey's Gate commemorating the refurbishment of the High Street. They left Rochester for a short stop at the Captain's House in the Dockyard where the Queen and the Prince were shown a model of the proposed development of St Mary's Island. The day finished at Gillingham Business Park where they were given a tour of the Jubilee Clip Factory and a skating display at the Ice Bowl.

The Queen, as Colonel-in-Chief of the Royal Engineers, has made several visits to their barracks at Brompton. On 28 March 1968, the Queen inspected the new installations at the Royal School of Military Engineering. In 1987 she opened the Royal Engineers Museum that had recently been transferred from Brompton Barracks to the Ravelin Building in King Arthur Road, Gillingham. Twenty years later the Queen returned. After an inspection of the troops she was given a crab and chicken lunch before posing for a photograph with the commanding officers.

Prince Philip in December 1977 visited workers at Chatham Dockyard where he was assured that there was no truth in the rumour that the dockyard would be closed. He was back with the Royal Navy on 15 October 1952 when he unveiled an addition to the Naval Memorial on the Great Lines. The extension forms a semicircular outer wall that holds fifty bronze plaques recording the names of the 10,112 who died in World War II. The memorial was designed by Edward Maufe and sculpted by Charles Wheeler⁹.

Princess Margaret, Countess Snowdon opened the new road bridge, at Rochester on 15 April 1970 followed by lunch *for honoured guests* in the Boardroom of the Bridge Chamber¹⁰. The new bridge was built by A.E. Farr Limited on the foundations of the old London, Chatham and Dover Railway Bridge that had opened in 1858.

Princess Alexandra spent a busy day in Rochester on 11 May 1978 for the commemoration of the 900th anniversary of the founding of St Bartholomew's Hospital in Rochester.¹¹ The Princess's programme for the day included the official opening of an addition to the accommodation (eleven new bungalows) at Watts Almshouses where she met trustees, residents and members of staff. St. Bartholomew's Hospital was built and subsequently financed to a large extent by contributions from Watts Charity.

Despite the initial enthusiasm for the sport, by the following decade, *rinkomania* had died down, and it wasn't until the early twentieth century that roller skating became popular once again as the photograph below illustrates!

If you are interested in learning more about the roller skating rink in Chatham, why not visit us at the Medway Archives and Local Studies centre to browse through the local papers and other resources?



Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre.

Notes

1. *SE Gazette*, 01/05/1876.
2. *Royal Cornwall Gazette*, 19/02/1876
3. *Chatham Observer*, 20/05/1876.
4. *Chatham Observer*, 06/05/1876.
5. Harris, E, *Changing Chatham*.
6. *Chatham Observer*, 13/05/1876.
7. *Chatham News*, 20/05/1876.
8. *SE Gazette*, 04/09/1876.

Charles Larkin 1775 - 1833

P.J. Salter



Pat Salter worked at the Guildhall Museum Rochester and at MALSC for over 20 years. She is a well known author and works include A Man of Many Parts - Edwin Harris 1859 – 1938; Pat is also a FOMA Vice President.

Part 2

In 1828 Larkin was appointed a Rochester Bridge Warden. Three years later he was senior Bridge Warden, a position not long held. That same year he and all the other Wardens and Assistants were *turned out* on 4 May when upwards of 1,000 persons were present at Castle hill when the whole of the existing court were removed from office.¹

The first mention of Larkin in the City of Rochester records is at the annual election of Mayor and officers in October 1805 when Larkin was chosen to be one of the two official Haymakers for the City. At the following year's elections he was promoted to the Committee for Charitable Uses as the 'Provider', the officer who administered the finances for the City charities. Despite several disputes with members of the City Council over the accounts, Larkin served as 'Mr Provider' until his death. The disputes which seem to have been due primarily to insufficient attention to detail, were probably caused by the amount of time required for all his other interests.

The council's patience seems to have been exhausted in 1812 when, what appears to be a draft copy of a petition to the Lord Chancellor for the money owed by Larkin *and his confederates*² is recorded. Larkin protested that he had paid out more than he had received. However the dispute continued.

On 18 January 1814 Larkin wrote to Francis Patten Esq.:

'I find that through the way in which the dividends have been intermixed with Child's House the new sum for the Ordnance Land has been omitted in my Accounts passed, I therefore take the earliest opportunity of informing you of my intentions to ascertain the particulars and wait upon you without loss of time when you will see how the mistake has arisen.'

The loss of time was apparently stretched to a month. An entry for the 14 February 1814 states that he still owed the sum of £409 19 1d 'and that unless he settles the same in the course of one week the Town Clerk will take measures to collect and demand the return those monies relating to Watts Charity and other charities.'

Five years later he was again in trouble when it was resolved that 'Mr Larkin to be proceeded against for rent due to the Corporation.'

Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother returned to Rochester on 18 May 1954 for the celebrations of the 27th Jubilee of Diocese of Rochester. Her Majesty was served coffee with Bishop Chevasse at Bishops Court followed by a Civic Lunch at the Guildhall where she was welcomed by the Mayor, Alderman Skipper and other dignitaries. After lunch the Queen attended a service in the cathedral. The lunch menu comprised:³

Shrimp Cocktail or Smoked Salmon
Cold Chicken
York Ham
Salad Mayonnaise
New Potatoes Garden Peas
Fresh Fruit Salad & Cream
Apricot Gateau
Cheese
Desert
Coffee
Cigars and Cigarettes

Thirty years later the Queen Mother returned to spend a day in the Medway area.⁴ In the morning she was at Upnor, where she toured the Arethusa Venture Centre and the Training Ship Arethusa, both of which were run by the Shaftesbury Homes, of which she was Patron. After lunch the Queen Mother was driven to the Rochester/Chatham border where she opened the refurbished Sir John Hawkins Hospital and was given tea by one of the residents. The hospital was built to provide for *ancient and decayed sailors and shipwrights* but following refurbishment also provides accommodation for their dependants.

Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip have visited the area on several occasions. On 19 October 1950, Princess Elizabeth, as she was then, visited St. George's Church in the Naval Barracks when the chancel was dedicated as a memorial to sailors of the Nore Command.

Queen Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh made an informal visit to the Oil Refinery at Grain on the morning of 5 August 1955.⁵ They were cheered by crowds of employees (who had been given the day off) and their families as the royal couple toured the main parts of the refinery. 3,000 flags were provided for the children to wave. In the afternoon Prince Philip opened the new technical college at Fort Horsted. He arrived by helicopter to a crowd of 4,000 cheering spectators and a welcome by Mr Knell, Chairman of the College Governors. In his speech the Prince spoke of the need for a good technical education in the present times where every aspect of life was influenced by science and technology. He finished with *as this thing is so badly needed I will waste no more time in declaring the college open*, cut a ribbon across the entrance to the college with a pair of gold plated scissors and was given a tour of the building.

On 31 March 1961, The Queen and Prince Philip were in Rochester as part of the celebrations commemorating 500 years of the Mayoral Charter granted by King Edward IV. In the morning they arrived at the Guildhall where various dignitaries were presented to the Queen. Following coffee the royal visitors were invited to inspect the city charters and sign the Visitors Book.⁶ before processing to the Cathedral for Maundy service where the Queen presented the purses to 35 elderly men and women. Sherry served at the Deanery was followed by a lunch at the Corn Exchange, the menu being:

Roll out the Red Carpet

P.J. Salter



Pat Salter worked at the Guildhall Museum Rochester and at MALSC for over 20 years. She is a well known author and works include A Man of Many Parts - Edwin Harris 1859 – 1938; Pat is also a FOMA Vice President.

We are delighted that Pat Salter has given us permission to serialise her book, Roll out the Red Carpet, which will later be published in its entirety on the FOMA website. The book is a compilation of work originally undertaken by Pat for an exhibition at MALSC and gives a fascinating insight into royal visits to the Medway Towns over the centuries, from Anglo Saxon times right up to the present day. Thanks to Rob Flood and Philip Dodd for helping to make publication possible.

Introduction

The red carpet has been rolled out, literally or metaphorically, for royal visitors to the Medway area for centuries. However, the red carpet has not always been a celebratory one. Wars, sieges, rebellions and invasions have been occasioned by, or resulted in, carpets of blood. The Medway area has been inhabited since ancient times but the first royal visitor that we know of, with any certainty, was Aethelbert, King of Kent, in 604 and the latest, at the time of writing, that of the Princess Royal in March 2011.

Twentieth Century

Part 2

In 1939 King George VI and Queen Elizabeth visited Shorts Aircraft Works at Rochester. They were given a tour of the factory by Oswald Short where they met many of the workforce and inspected the interior of the Empire Flying Boat *Australia*.¹

On 16 April 1942 they were at Chatham Dockyard to meet the workers, sailors and Royal Marines. In May 1948 the King returned to Chatham, as Admiral of the Fleet, when he visited the Royal Naval Barracks at H.M.S Pembroke.² The groups inspected by the King included the Sea Cadets ranging in age from nine to thirteen years and the Royal Marine Cadets.

By 1807 he must have been a man of some wealth. For the next two years he was granted leases for two pieces of property from the Corporation at some cost. On 22 February 1807 he applied to rent 'an enclosed space of ground on the left side of gateway under the Clock House.'³ (now Corn Exchange). This probably refers to the same property as in a lease of 22 February 1808 which was granted to Larkin,

'a coach master, for a piece of ground used as a carpenter's yard and part of the ground of the prison called the Dolphin, part of the Butchers' Market and building used as a Council Chamber bounding the Crown and Thistle [now Rochester Food Hall] for 40 years at rent of £11 and to expend £650 within the first three years.'

The carpenter's yard may have been where Larkin worked as a carpenter and also where he was a coach master. Certainly the Crown and Thistle next door was in a convenient position for a coach master to provide a service for travellers.

Nine months later Larkin was granted a lease of the Council Chamber and ground behind the same for forty years at a rent of £66.11s and expend £650 within the first three years. The Council Chamber was part of the old guildhall which had not yet been demolished.

A lease dated 21 August 1809⁴ was granted to Larkin, when he is described as a land surveyor, for 'a piece of ground being part of the Town Ditch between the North wall and George Lane also White Hart Lane with three messuages lately built one licensed and called the Rochester Castle' for a term of ninety nine years for £1,126. His application for a licence caused consternation amongst the other local licensed victuallers who pointed out that as there were already fifteen licensed premises between the King's Head and Rochester Bridge, another was superfluous. Larkin's protest that some of those premises were unfit caused an inspection of all the licensed premises in Rochester. This resulted in one closure and a licence for Larkin.⁵

He also used part of the property as an Auctioneer, Land Surveyor and Appraiser. By 1810 he was holding auctions in the *City Repository* as it was then known although some he held away from the office. Henry Smetham wrote that one such auction featured marshland at Strood, for which Larkin produced an advert in 'which he..... forecast the future development of this land in a way that events have since more than justified.'

On another occasion he was at Frindsbury to hold the sale of the 'Whole of the Stock in Trade in and about the premises belonging to Messrs J & H Brindley.' This included about fifty thousand oil cake and twenty cauldrons of coal. Three days later he was back in Rochester, at Eastgate auctioning 'the valuable Stock in Trade & Household furniture' as well as horses, harness, gig and a cart of Mr. Thompson, a bankrupt. In May, 1830 the Rochester Gazette advertised a sale Larkin held at the City Repository of the *Modern Household Effects* belonging to the Reverend J. Phillips 'removed from Cliffe' including a Broadwood piano, a set of rosewood occasional and card tables.

Notes

1. *Traffic and Politics*, edited by Nigel Yates and James Gibson.
2. MALSC: Ch46/4144.
3. MALSC: RCA/A1/5.
4. MALSC: RCA/T53.
5. MALSC: Best Collection.

Memories Of Prefabs

Odette Buchanan



Odette is a retired teacher and, of course, FOMA Secretary. She is fascinated by local history and is actively involved in many aspects of this. She was a City of Rochester Society visitors' guide, a steward and guide at Restoration House, she has researched and presented as talks many aspects of local history, especially Broom Hill. Her book, *Broomhill – Strood's Hidden Gem* was published in 2013 by the City of Rochester Society, (available at: www.city-of-rochester.org.uk/shop/broomhill-stroods-hidden-gem/). Her book, *Two Gentlemen of Strood*, (short biographies of Henry Smetham and Rev. Caleb Parfekt) is also published by the City of Rochester Society. She has produced sundry interpretation boards around Strood and was involved in the now completed England's Past for Everyone Victoria County History Project. and the HLF funded Valley of Visions Strood Community Trail.

This year it is 70 years since the first post-war prefabs were built. In this series of articles although mention is made of other prefab sites around Medway, Odette has concentrated her research on those erected on what is now Broomhill Park in Strood.

Part 2

You may recall that in Part 1 (see *The Clock Tower* Issue 44, November 2016), I discussed the urgent need for more housing in 1945 at the end of the Second World War, the identification of sites, and how the organisation and building of the 'Palaces for the People' was started.

Looking at Strood's Broomhill specifically, there had been steady encroachment of housing up the hill from the mid-1800s but the expansion came to an abrupt halt with the declaration of war in 1939, leaving the summit still green. In 1946 prefabs were suggested for many places in Medway, including Broomhill. A site plan was prepared and by 1950 there were three lines of them with a road called Merlin Road running through the middle. They backed onto the Talbot Estate allotments and there was a path from King Arthur's Drive.

6.30 embarked in boats. Got a rotten crew, none ever been in a boat before and got carried downstream very nearly over cataract with Colonel and staff shouting at me. N.B. I knew as much about a boat as rest of crew. However got away and my boat passed about 18 others and came in 3rd having started last. Disembarked, loaded camels and started to march to Firket about 13 miles [Firket was 5 miles below Kosheh, see the map on page 27]. Very bad marching, loose sand. Halted for half an hour at 1 pm for men to get water and have dinner. Had nothing with me, so got no lunch. Reached Firket at dusk about 6.30 pm very tired. Was asked to dinner with Mounted Infantry; refused by Col Lee however who went himself. Was put out on night piquet with my company. Tried to get a dinner for myself worthy of Christmas (had splendid appetite), the Company Sergeant's haversack and canteen of tea made an excellent meal. Supposed to go round my sentries every hour of night. Firket about 6 or 7 miles from enemy's position.¹¹

A Brief Guide to the Life of Alfred William Baker

When?	Rank	Where Was He?	Doing What?	Other Events
March 1885	Lieutenant	Genoa, Nice	?	-
Summer 1885	Lieutenant	Newcastle	Training camp	Lord Salisbury Prime Minister
October 1885	Lieutenant	Sailed to Egypt	In DLI battalion	-
December 1885	Lieutenant	The Sudan at Wady Halfa	30 December Battle of Ginnis	-

Travels of a Tin Trunk will be serialised in full in *The Clock Tower*. If you would like a copy of the whole book, it is available from the author, Michael Baker, at a cost of £10. Please contact *Clock Tower* Editor, Amanda Thomas, for details.

Notes

1. Alfred's letter AWB 1885 10 13 from aboard *SS Deccan*.
2. AWB 1885 10 25 from Abbasiyeh camp, near Cairo.
3. Quoted in Ref 4, H E Raugh's *Victorians at War* 2004, p 144.
4. Field Force State, Ginnis, 30 Dec 1885, report by Lt. Col Murray. PRO WO 110/10.
5. Telegram 38 from Cairo to War Office. PRO WO 110/10, page 13.
6. AWB 1885 11 02 from Abbassiyeh camp, 1885 11 08 from Cairo.
7. AWB 1885 11 15 from Luxor.
8. AWB 1885 12 02 from Aswan and pages inserted in diary D3.
9. AWB 1885 12 06 from Tagoo Heights. His pay was 5s 3d a day plus Khedivial allowance 3s a day and 3s field allowance (bank book R2 and AWB 1885 12 02).
10. AWB 1885 12 18 from Ambigola Wells. Alfred's preferred spelling of Kosheh was Kosheh.
11. Entry in Alfred's diary D1, dated 25 December 1885.

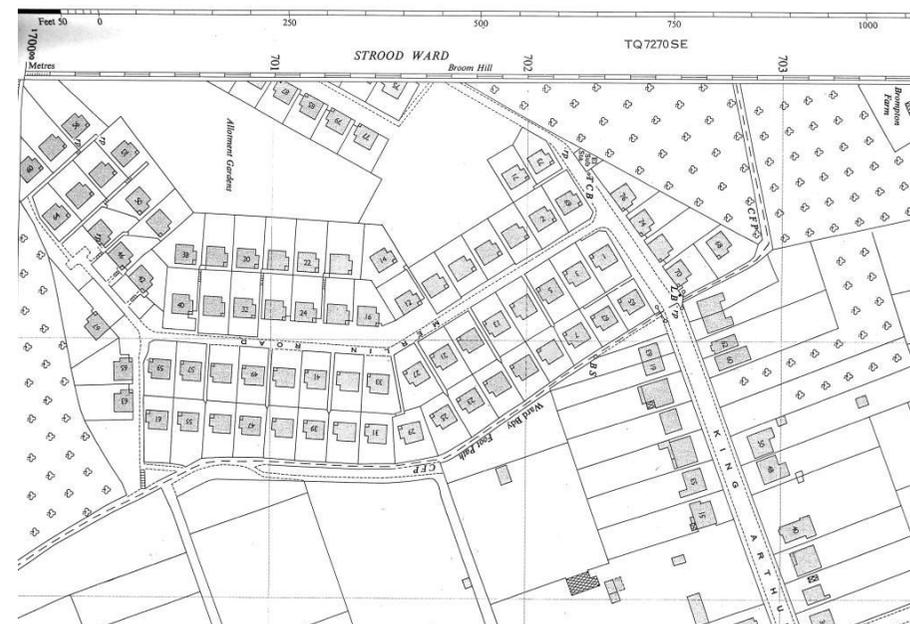
Christmas Eve, Alfred was at Akasheh, the end of the railway, *beastly place, sandstorm been raging, eyes and mouth full of dust. We sleep on the sand behind the trenches, had to dig myself out this morning. We are going to have a big battle at Kosheh in a week or less, the niggers are all entrenched there.*¹⁶



Alfred's drawing of the camp above Assuan (Aswan).

By December 6 Alfred and the DLI were back on barges above Aswan, *awful cold at night with rats running over you travelling up to the second cataract at Wady Halfa. From there, on the 10th another railway took them 45 miles to Ambigola. They were to build a fort there, an awful place, nothing green within sight. The only excitement is the train coming in 3 times a day or an occasional scare that the Arabs are at us. No use holding this beastly place. General Stephenson is coming up today. Stephenson, then 63, was popular with the troops: he had the courtesy of an earlier age and was liked for his decided opinions and resolve. By Christmas Eve, Alfred was at Akasheh, the end of the railway, *beastly place, sandstorm been raging, eyes and mouth full of dust. We sleep on the sand behind the trenches, had to dig myself out this morning. We are going to have a big battle at Kosheh in a week or less, the niggers are all entrenched there.*¹⁶*

The story picks up in his diary for December 25 1885: *Slept in exposed sandy place, bad sandstorm all night, smothered with gritty sand. 4 am (an hour before daylight), troops standing to arms. Awfully cold as it had been all night with only 2 blankets. Stood till reveille at day break, 5.50 am breakfast of cold bacon, tea, ration biscuit.*



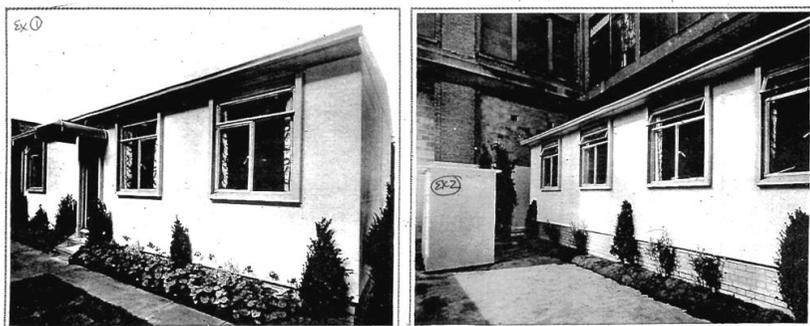
A plan of the Broomhill site in Strood.

There were two types of Prefabs: English and American. 8,000 American ones were imported by the time the Lease-Lend agreement between the USA and the UK finished in September, 1945. These had pitched roofs, asbestos-cement cladding and were termite proof! They were smaller than the British ones and therefore used for childless couples, OAPs, etc. Also, these really were temporary and did only last ten years or less. Because of the asbestos, they had a four minute fire warning.

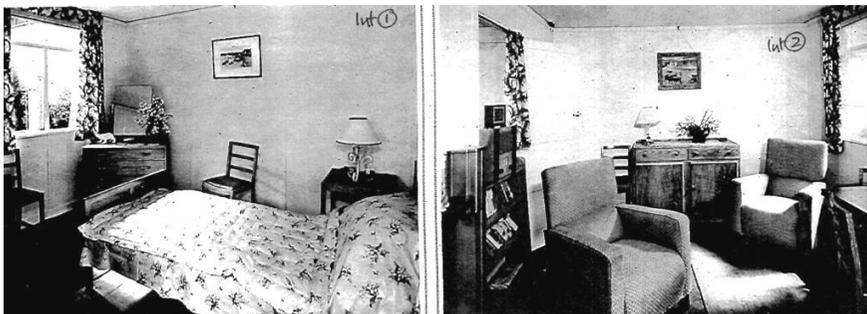
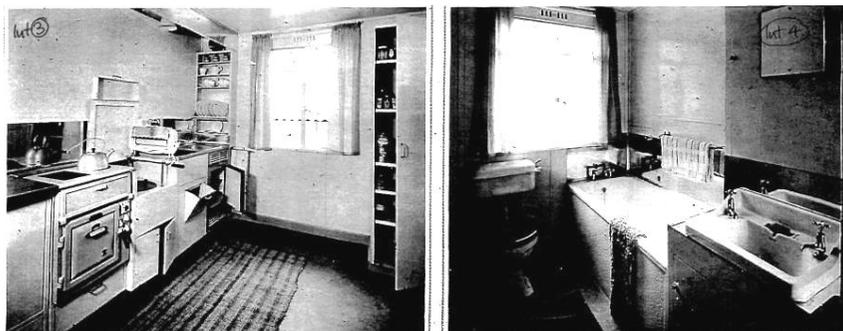
At first all the temporary British ones were called *Portal* after the then Housing Minister, Lord Portal. The Acorn Mk.V cost about £1,085 altogether, comprising components, foundations, utilities and labour. They had asbestos clad cement panels bolted on to a steel frame, again with a four minute fire warning. They were very robust and generally outlived the three other main British types – the Tarran, Uni-Seco and AIRO B2. These often had unused Anderson Shelters for bike and tool sheds and coal stores at a cost of £12 13s 6d converted. An Anderson shelter was a family-sized bomb shelter that people had put into their garden during World War Two. A hole was dug and filled in with concrete, the shelter was covered with sheets of bent corrugated iron and fitted with bunk beds. Supply was means tested – free if on National Assistance (predecessor of benefits) otherwise the prefab had to be bought from the council.)

The structure of all types of prefab needed a lot of maintenance and fixtures and fittings were

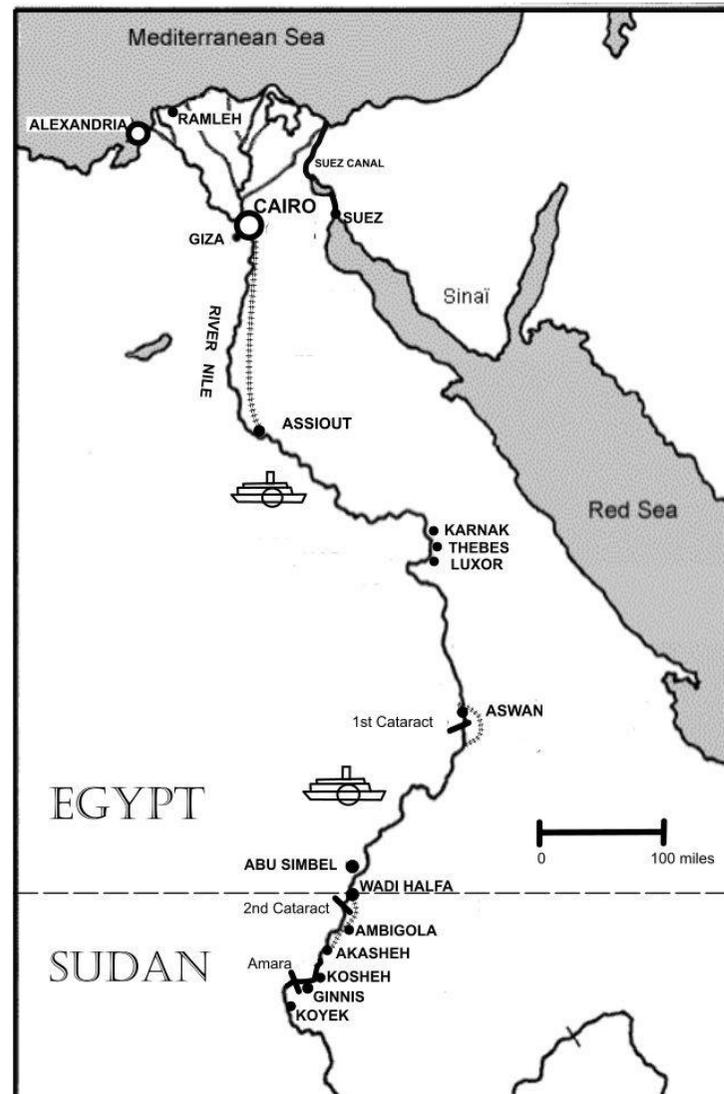
also quite dear. Clothes line posts cost 15/- and were supplied by the council. Fences were too expensive and so there were none though rabbit proof wire was often used. All the different types had fitted cupboards in most rooms and fitted kitchens that included a 'pull-down' ironing board.



Typical prefabs



Prefab interiors.



Alfred's journey up The Nile, 1885-86.

By December 6 Alfred and the DLI were back on barges above Aswan, *awful cold at night with rats running over you* travelling up to the second cataract at Wady Halfa. From there, on the 10th another railway took them 45 miles to Ambigola. They were to build a fort there, *an awful place, nothing green within sight. The only excitement is the train coming in 3 times a day or an occasional scare that the Arabs are at us. No use holding this beastly place. General Stephenson is coming up today.* Stephenson, then 63, was popular with the troops: he had the courtesy of an earlier age and was liked for his decided opinions and resolve. By

'We've fought with many men across the seas,
An' some was brave an' some was not
The Paythan an' the Zulu an' Burmese,
But the Fuzzy was the finest of the lot.'³

To give the military details, Alfred was part of the 1st Brigade of the Frontier Field Force under General Butler. It consisted of English: 52 officers, 1,757 men, 20 horses and 163 camels, plus Egyptian: 12 officers, 255 men, 5 horses and 186 camels.⁴ The Force had orders not to reconquer the Sudanese but to keep them out of Egypt. The Mahdi had died and the leadership passed to the Khalifa Abdullahi, who hoped to take the whole of Egypt in retaliation for the years of oppression. But not even Gladstone could risk losing control of the vital route to India.

General Stephenson, who was senior to Butler, had written on December 4: "Proposed action: withdraw to Wady Halfa after successful encounter with enemy when this can be effected without loss of credit."⁵ The message intended for the Sudanese, despite their success at Khartoum and their recent harassing of outposts, was that the British could beat them and would resist any attempt they might make on Egypt.

Alfred wrote home on November 2: *we have been ordered up the Nile, probably to Aswan, 500 miles up river. It will take a month to get there. I have been for a donkey ride or two: grand donkeys they have which take the place of cabs. Two weeks later from Cairo: Just off up Nile at short notice, awful bustle... A long journey escorting a skein of camels and have not had a square meal all the time, everything packed. The authorities say there is sure to be a row of some sort, small or big they don't know, with 30,000 black chaps knocking about. Wonderful things they fit us up in: putties, spine protectors, goggles, veils. A Tommy was overheard to say they'd only got to be set alight to look like a lot of ... Christmas trees.*⁶

Leaving the citadel at Cairo on November 8, they travelled by train overnight - *dirty journey, men in open trucks* - to reach Assiout on the Nile. Embarking there, the group of about 750 men was *getting on up the river about 30 miles a day, going from daybreak to dusk, two steamers each towing two barges. Very interesting trip for an antiquarian always coming across some old places. We have been all day here (Luxor) today coaling so that we have been on shore. I made a couple of donkey rides to Karnak and Thebes: all much the same ruined temples carved all over with those peculiar figures. Wonderful buildings in their way.*⁷

On November 20 they reached Aswan and early on the 21st marched to a camp, *a place called Tagoog Heights, a bare hill 4 miles from the town. We dwell in mud huts without doors or windows, no roof except palm leaves: very comfortable.* Next day he was back with his men at the riverside to load more baggage on to trains for the short railway loop around the first cataract. On the 23rd *had to go with half the battalion to pull a steamer through the cataract. Hard pulling till 3 pm, got her through with 600 men at work. Corporal drowned in river.*⁸

His open reactions written to his Mother are refreshing. *It is not the climate that knocks people up but hard work on bad food. Rations are bully beef and biscuit: the beef aint' bad but it gets monotonous. Ripping good pay and live cheap: 2 suits of khakee and 2 flannel shirts. Khakee is good stuff, looks smart when it's old with puttees that we always wear.*⁹ Evidently this was an early form of khaki as it soon washed almost white.

However, one still needed some furniture, soft furnishings and linen. Besides the cost, most consumer goods were still rationed. Coupons were needed and one was therefore restricted as to how much furniture etc. could be purchased. Married couples were allowed a wardrobe (12 units), a kitchen table (6 units), a metal bedstead (5 units), a dining chair (1 unit) and armchair (6 units).

In 1941 clothes rationing was introduced because of the short supply of raw materials; later this was extended to household goods. The aim was to make consumer goods of reasonable quality at affordable prices and all of these had to bear the utility mark.

The utility mark and utility furniture sold at Harwood's, Strood High Street.

Utility Furniture and Logo



Proof of their reasonable quality is borne out by my own experience as we own a very nice oak chest of drawers with the utility mark on the back! Because of this rationing, second-hand furniture was much more expensive than it is today, besides being very popular, because it was not of the plain, easily identifiable design of the utility furniture.

Whatever the design, all the prefabs had by today's standards huge gardens and the council encouraged and promoted gardening and the planting of food. Some even allowed hens to be kept. The council organised gardening competitions and talks by professional gardeners. Often the Women's Voluntary Service (WVS) was involved too. The Queen sent plants from Sandringham, Queen Mary (the widow of King George V) donated a Challenge Cup and the WVS organised the efficient and fair distribution of many voluntary donations of plants and seeds.

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Travels of a Tin Trunk

Michael Baker



Michael Baker's interest in family history was started by a great-uncle who once unrolled a family tree on the dining-room table. It was seven feet long. After a career in Electrical Engineering, including 20 years overseas, he opened some boxes in the Owletts' attic ...

In his issue of The Clock Tower, the fascinating story continues of what Michael found in the tin trunk belonging to Alfred, the brother of Michael's grandfather, Herbert Baker.

Part 3

On February 2 1885, Alfred William Baker sailed on the *SS India* to Genoa. His sketch books show that he spent three weeks in Nice, and two each in Mentone and Bordighera in nearby Italy, where he sketched this frisky horse. Whether he was there to recover from illness or as part of some military exercise is not clear. After a week in Milan he travelled by train via Paris to Owletts and was at home from April to August.

But while Alfred was in England, his battalion was quite suddenly called to Egypt.

Towards The Sudan, 1885

Egypt had been important to Britain for many years because it provided a shorter overland route to India than around The Cape. When Napoleon had threatened this in 1798 Britain was quick to respond, defeating the French at both Alexandria and the Battle of the Nile. By the late 1800s a new threat appeared from the south. Exploited for many years by the Ottoman Empire and by Egypt as a source of taxes, slaves and ivory, the Sudanese resolved to unite and rebel. The catalyst was Muhammad Ahmad, the obscure son of a carpenter, who in 1881 proclaimed himself the Mahdi or Guided One of the Prophet.

He chose an opportune time because Egypt was in chaos as well as in debt. In November 1869, the Suez Canal, built by the Frenchman de Lessops was opened, but left Egypt in debt to France. Britain's Prime Minister, Disraeli, was quick thinking and borrowed money to buy Egypt's share of the canal in 1875. Thus Britain gained an equal control with France and that removed any risk of the French closing the canal for military advantage.

Meanwhile General Gordon, Governor-General of The Sudan, had mapped the Upper Nile in the 1870s, established trade posts and suppressed the slave trade. By 1880 he advised London that Egypt's policy of milking The Sudan could not last. Gladstone, now the prime minister, saw no benefit in imperialist expansion and announced that Britain would not uphold any claim to The Sudan. But Britain would certainly defend Egypt; it would train Egypt's troops and add its own if required to fight the Mahdi.

General Gordon was left in a terrible predicament. All he could do was to assemble his staff and families, British and Egyptian, and prepare to leave Khartoum. He had no troops. He made placatory offers to the Mahdi who chose to ignore, humiliate and eventually starve Gordon out. The disaster of Khartoum was all too obvious long before it happened. After prevaricating, Gladstone sent a relief force up the Nile. It battled the Sudanese with success on more than one occasion, but reached Khartoum too late. Gordon had been killed on his doorstep and a few of his number staggered back to Egypt to tell the tale.

That was in January 1885. In March, Alfred's battalion was summoned from Gibraltar to Egypt, but Alfred himself was by then on his way home. A quiet summer followed for him, with cricket of course, until he was called for training in Newcastle and at a camp at Whitley Bay. Not until October 3 did he set sail aboard the *SS Deccan* via Ireland for Alexandria, to join his battalion. This is where Alfred's letters start, sent to his Mother or Father or sometimes to a brother or sister and many were kept. The letters often include drawings, and they add to the treasures of the trunk; they let him tell his own story.

He joked from Queenstown (Cork) in Ireland: *my exterior arrived here safely after a beastly passage. As luck will have it I am on duty today and can't get away, else I might have gone to Cork. I am thinking of deserting here, it is so infernally rough. From Malta: I've survived the perils of the deep so far. We had a very bad time of it after passing Gib. I have not suffered from seasickness though since the day we left Ireland, but it is very unpleasant all the same tumbling about. We are pretty comfortable on this ship as it is still a P & O and has not been altered much, very crowded though with 1,000 men on board.*¹

After a week near the mouth of the Nile at Ramleh, he went to a field camp near Cairo called Abbasiyeh. What was the next step to be? His letters echo the Army's grapevine: India? Called up river? Stay a year? He soon learnt the Army's trick of making the best of the uncertain life. As well as musketry training he was delighted to find some keen cricketers among the 9 or 10 regiments camped nearby: *the cricket season is just commencing and I just got here in time for a match. I played for Cairo against Abbasiyeh and we made 300 for 9 wickets. There are a lot of keen cricketers among the nine or ten regiments... a very decent ground, but an asphalt pitch covered with matting. I did not like it a bit, but get used to it, made 22 yesterday.*²

Alfred must have heard plenty of stories of what the Sudanese fighting Dervishes were like. The Dervish had earned a wholesome respect as he had driven both British and Egyptian out of The Sudan apart from Suakin on the Red Sea coast. Kitchener later made it clear; "You are facing the most savage army in the world. The Arab warrior is like Sudan's wild buffalo: if he sees you he will kill you unless you kill him first." Kipling later summed up the Tommy's attitude in *Fuzzy Wuzzy*: