

## ***Strood's Broomhill Triumphs in the RHS South East in Bloom Awards!***

In September the Friends of Broomhill charity received two Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) South East in Bloom awards.

The charity was given a Level 5 – Outstanding in the It's Your Neighbourhood Award, an honour Broomhill has now received for four consecutive years. In recognition of this, the charity was also given a National Certificate of Distinction, a huge achievement as only two organisations achieved this accolade. In addition to this, Strood's glorious open space received a Green Flag award for the eighth consecutive year.

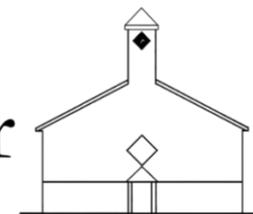
The Friends of Broomhill is now considering other categories they can enter next year, particularly in light of the recent acquisition of the adjacent orchard. More details on page 41.



*Broomhill, looking out over the River Medway; photograph by Danielle Haughey*

If undelivered, please return to:  
Medway Archives Centre, 32 Bryant Road, Strood, Rochester, ME2 3EP.

# The Clock Tower



Issue Number 56: November 2019  
£2.00; free to members

The Friends of Medway Archives  
Excepted Charity registration number XR92894

## Welcome, Elspeth!



Introducing Elspeth Millar, our new Archivist at the Medway Archives Centre!  
Pictured here with FOMA Chairman, Elaine Gardner; more on page 6.

Book your tickets now for the MAC Christmas event on 4 December!  
See page 38 for details.

## Reminiscence Sessions at the Medway Archives Centre

Throughout the summer and autumn, Norma Crowe and Helen Worthy have organised a series of reminiscence sessions at the Medway Archives Centre which have proved to be extremely popular. Sessions have included: *High Days and Holidays, WWII and Evacuation, Winget and Short's, Railways Trams and Omnibuses, Prefabs and Council Housing, Pubs, Clubs and Restaurants, Family Life, National Service, Chatham and the Royal Navy, Dockyard Apprentices, and School Days.* More on page 8.



*Winget and Short's (below).*



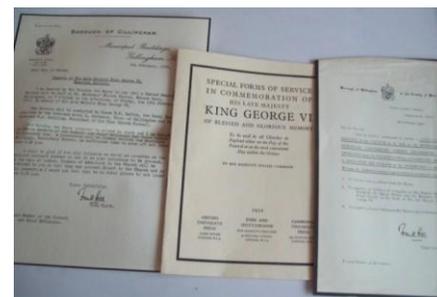
*Railways Trams and Omnibuses (above).*



**A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR  
FROM EVERYONE AT FOMA!**

## EBay Purchases for MAC

Pictured below is the extraordinary array of documents discovered on EBay which were purchased for MAC by Chris de Coulon Berthoud on FOMA's behalf. See page 5 for more information.



## A Clock Tower Special Feature The Outbreak of World War Two



See page 16.

Further articles on World War Two can be read in the *Clock Tower* archive on the FOMA website at <http://foma-lsc.org/journal.html> Articles include: *Medway Memories of World War Two and the Battle of Britain*, Issue 19, August 2010, Issue 20, November 2010, and Issue 21, February 2011; *Medway World War II Evacuation Special*, Issue 17, February 2010.

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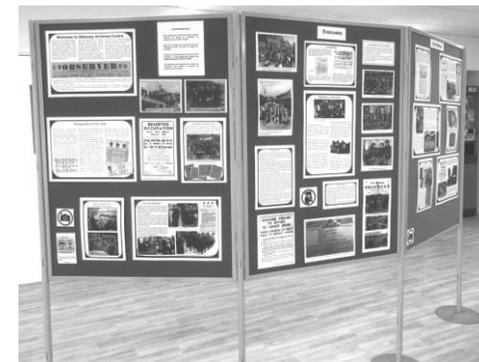
## *Chairman's Letter*

Elaine Gardner



In the last edition of *The Clock Tower* I was delighted to share the news that a new Archivist had finally been appointed. Since then Rob Flood and I have twice had the opportunity to meet Elspeth Millar. The first was a short introduction when she visited MAC at the end of August to finalise her working arrangements and meet staff. The second occasion was in early October when Elspeth invited Rob and me to come in for a meeting with her so that she could find out more about FOMA, what we did and ways in which we could all work together. We were also delighted that Elspeth was able to join us at our November committee meeting, and this gave Amanda Thomas the perfect opportunity to take some photographs and to find out more about Elspeth – see page 6.

Opposite are photographs of the display boards FOMA have purchased for Norma to use for exhibitions at MAC. They were put to very good use in the recent one-day exhibition on World War Two in Medway held on Saturday 12 October. These special events are proving very popular and bring in a number of people who are visiting MAC for the first time. The recent attendance was just short of 100, which is pretty good for a four hour event, and did attract several young people. Perhaps this is because WWII is part of the history syllabus in schools - unlike my time at school when history stopped with the outbreak of WWI! The staff at MAC work very hard putting together the various aspects covered in these exhibitions. The current one on display in the foyer is also most informative and is about the Watts Charity. Do go and have a look if you get the chance; it is on display until the beginning of January.



While helping at the WWII event I was asked by Norma to present the prize of a book token to the winner of the Medway Archives Children's History Trail organised in August and advertised on the back cover of the last *Clock Tower*. This I was delighted to do. There were several correct entries and so the winner was pulled out of a hat. The victor was Ben Clayton – perhaps to the dismay of his younger brother who also had the correct answers. It is good to see young people getting involved.



*Ben Clayton, the winner of the Medway Archives Children's History Trail with his certificate and book token, presented by FOMA Chairman, Elaine Gardner.*

The last edition of the *Clock Tower* also carried an advert for a new booklet, published by the Friends of Eastgate House about the Buck family, researched and written by one of FOMA's members Pauline Weeds. Having purchased and read this I can recommend it (details are shown again below). How Pauline managed to sort out the five generations of Bucks – all called Peter – who owned and occupied Eastgate House from circa 1590 until 1687, when Peter No 5 sold the house to a Rochester grocer John Parker for £300, is a mystery to me. I have trouble sorting out two generations with the same name! The book is full of interesting facts about the house and family and certainly worth the £3.50 cover price.

This being the last edition of *Clock Tower* for 2019 I would like to wish you all a very Happy Christmas and hope that we will see many of you at the MAC Christmas event on Wednesday 4 December. See page 38 for further details.

## NEW EASTGATE HOUSE BOOK!

### *The Buck Family & Eastgate House*

by FOMA member Pauline Weeds  
£3.50 available from Eastgate House, Rochester.

Further information from Terri Zbyszewska, The Membership Secretary, FoEH,  
31 The Esplanade, Rochester, ME1 1QW or at [tzbyszewska@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:tzbyszewska@yahoo.co.uk)

## About The Clock Tower

*The Clock Tower* is the quarterly journal produced and published by the Friends of Medway Archives (FOMA), [www.foma-lsc.org/index.html](http://www.foma-lsc.org/index.html).

### Editorial deadlines

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

**The copy deadline for Issue 57 of *The Clock Tower* is Monday 27 January 2020, with publication on Wednesday 19 February 2020.**

### Publication date

The fourth Wednesday following the editorial deadline.

*The Clock Tower* is printed by Barkers Litho, Unit 18 Castle View Business Centre, Gas House Road, Rochester, Kent, ME1 1PB; telephone: 01634 829048, email: [info@barkerslitho.co.uk](mailto:info@barkerslitho.co.uk)

### Copyright

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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](http://www.foma-lsc.org/newsletter.html)

*The Clock Tower Index* (<http://foma-lsc.org/journal.html>) is updated by Nic Nicholas.

### Further Information

Further information on the Medway Archives Centre can be obtained on the MAC website <https://cityark.medway.gov.uk/> or by writing to Medway Archives Centre, 32 Bryant Road, Strood, Rochester, Kent, ME2 3EP. Telephone +44 (0)1634 332714; fax +44 (0)1634 297060; email: [malsc@medway.gov.uk](mailto:malsc@medway.gov.uk)

General enquiries about the Friends can be obtained from the FOMA Chairman: Elaine Gardner, 102 Valley View Road, Rochester, ME1 3NX, Kent; [emgardner@virginmedia.com](mailto:emgardner@virginmedia.com); 01634 408595. All correspondence should be directed to the FOMA Secretary: Christopher de Coulon Berthoud, 4 Albert Road, Rochester, ME1 3DG, Kent; [berthoud@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:berthoud@blueyonder.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](mailto:betty-cole@outlook.com)

inspired by creating a sense of peace and happiness with the community and personal life, through exploring art and the use of creative spaces. Included in standard admission prices.

### **December 7 - December 8: Wartime Christmas Weekend**

Discover how Christmas was celebrated during the Second World War!

Immerse yourself in the festivities and get a vintage makeover, watch live demonstrations or browse our market for festive handicrafts and last minute treats. You could even learn to Lindy Hop! On Sunday 8th we'll also be joined by the Brompton & Invicta Military Wives Choir as they sing traditional carols. No visit is complete without a trip to see Sapper Santa!

The Bridge Study Centre

Bridging has been an essential part of warfare for thousands of years. In this gallery the full history of military bridging is explored. Hands on activities from our Sapper Workshop and dressing up are also available for kids.

**Opening hours: Tuesday – Sunday 10.00am to 5.00pm, last entry 4.00 pm; Bank Holidays: 10.00 am to 5.00pm, last entry 4.00 pm; CLOSED MONDAYS. Admission: adult – £8.40, child (Aged 5-16) – £5.70, concessions – £5.70, family ticket (2 adults and 2 children) – £22.50; children under 5: free.**



## **Blue Town Heritage Centre, The Criterion Music Hall and Cinema**

[www.thecriterionbluetown.co.uk/#!/criterion-music-hall/cb3i](http://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>

## **Secretary's Report**

Chris de Coulon Berthoud

### **EBay Purchases for MAC**

At the FOMA Committee Meeting in September there was great excitement when I produced a number of documents purchased on EBay for the Medway Archives Centre (MAC) on FOMA's behalf; they were originally discovered for sale online by MAC's Cindy O'Halloran.



The items (and as pictured on the inside back cover) include a souvenir document and an invitation to the celebration banquet, in 1953, of the incorporation of the Borough of Gillingham. Other items are the Order of Service for the funeral of Councillor George Morton Pinfold, Mayor of Gillingham 1949-1951, the Order of Ceremony for the Honorary Freedom of the Borough of Gillingham of Alderman Bessie Jane Parr and Alderman Giles Burton on 19 April 1950. Also included are some documents relating to the Opening of the Medway Crematorium in 1959. There are some naval and military items also, including the order of the memorial service for the 75 men who lost their lives when the submarine HMS *Affray* foundered in the English Channel in 1951. Also included is the programme of events for the 1953 Naval and Military Tattoo that took place at the United Services Stadium in Gillingham, the programme for the Formal Adoption of Territorial Army Units, as well as programmes for ceremonies honouring the Corp of Royal Engineers, and HMS *Pembroke*. Finally, there are documents regarding Gillingham's commemoration of the funeral of King George VI. The total paid for these items was £30.

### ***New Members***

A warm welcome to new FOMA members Susan Wright, and also Murray Wright from New Zealand.

See Murray's interesting quest to discover more about his family history in *Readers' Letters* on page 35.

## Introducing Elspeth Millar!

Amanda Thomas



We were absolutely delighted that Elspeth was able to take some time out from the annual stocktaking at the Medway Archives Centre to meet us all and contribute to the November FOMA committee meeting. Not only did this mean we were able to get to know her better, but she also immediately used her experience in digital technology to advise on the FOMA website. Webmaster Alex Thomas revealed at the meeting that certain archived copies of *The Clock Tower* were receiving a considerable number of hits on the website. Elspeth knew the best software to use to find out why this was the case by establishing exactly which articles people have been reading.

Elspeth was born in Wateringbury, where she still lives. She attended Invicta Grammar School in Maidstone and from there went on to the University of East Anglia to read American and English History. In the university holidays she undertook a mixture of volunteering and paid work at the Centre for Kentish Studies. Then, during her year abroad in Philadelphia, she worked at the university archive where she first realised she wanted to become an archivist. Following graduation life took a more hectic turn with a job working at the Aviva archive for the first two days of the week, and then Wednesdays to Fridays at the oral history section of the British Library. It was to this department in the BL that Elspeth would return after taking an MA in Archives and Records Management at London's UCL.

Elspeth remained at the British Library for five years honing her experience in the digital sector. Then in 2014 she moved to the University of Kent at Canterbury to set up the British Stand-Up Comedy Archive at the Templeman Library. The aim of the archive is to 'celebrate, preserve, and provide access to the archives and records of British stand-up comedy and comedians'<sup>1</sup> and it is an invaluable research resource for the university's drama students and anyone interested in the history of British comedy. Elspeth's work at the university developed and expanded and her eventual role at the university, before leaving to join MAC, was as Digital Archivist.

## Strood Fellowship

Strood Fellowship meet every third Monday in the month. 7.30pm, at St Nicholas Church Hall, Edward Street, Strood (first right off Gun Lane to car park). Admission £2 for members or £3 for non-members (including tea and biscuits), £5 Annual Membership. We are interested in the history of Strood and surrounding areas and have outings to local historic buildings. For more details ring J. Weller on 01634 309033 or Len Feist 01634 717135.

## HUGUENOT MUSEUM

discover your story

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](http://www.huguenotmuseum.org), call 01634 789347 or email [learning@huguenotmuseum.org](mailto:learning@huguenotmuseum.org). Unless otherwise indicated all events can be booked at the Huguenot Museum reception, over the phone on 01634 789347 or via our website: [www.huguenotmuseum.org](http://www.huguenotmuseum.org)



The latest information can be found at:  
[www.kentarchaeology.org.uk/](http://www.kentarchaeology.org.uk/)

## The Royal Engineers Museum, Library and Archive

Prince Arthur Road, Gillingham, Kent, ME4 4UG

**SEE THE WEBSITE** [www.re-museum.co.uk](http://www.re-museum.co.uk) **FOR FURTHER DETAILS.**

The Royal Engineers Museum is Kent's largest military museum, with a designated collection of historical and international importance. Open Tuesday to Sunday, 10am to 5 pm, last entry 4pm.

**Library and Archives:** essential building maintenance is taking place but a limited service will be available from early summer 2018 – please check the website [www.re-museum.co.uk](http://www.re-museum.co.uk) for more details.

Events

### September 10 - December 22: Medway Reimagined

This exhibition presents work by Colony, a group of Medway-based artists who all take inspiration from the local area. Originally founded by Simon Mills as a kind of artist support group colony brings together artists who work in a variety of mediums from painting and collage to ceramics and photography. Access to the exhibition is included in standard admission prices.

### October 15 - December 22: A Lasting Peace for Medway

This exhibition marks the culmination of a year-long programme of art workshops funded by the Big Lottery Fund. Hosted by local artist Tina Lawlor Mottram, each workshop has been



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](http://www.chathamtraction.org.uk).

## **Gillingham and Rainham Local History Society**

Twydall Evangelical Church, Goudhurst Road, Twydall, Kent. ME8 6LQ.

The society meets on the second Friday of the month, from September to June (no meeting in January), from 2.00 - 4.30 pm.

13 December - Film Afternoon: *Kent Life Remembered* (dvd);  
14 February 2020 - *The History of Water Colour Painting* - Mark Lewis.  
13 March - *Upnor and The Dutch Raid* - John Guy.  
3 April - *Toll Roads, Tunnels and Bridges* - Geoff Beer.  
8 May - AGM and reminiscence afternoon.

Tea and coffee is available before the meeting for a small charge.

New members and visitors are always welcome; annual membership £20, visitors £3 per meeting.

For further information, please visit the website [www.grlhs.org](http://www.grlhs.org)  
Or contact Val Barrand on 07947 583327 or email [lupusrufus@sky.com](mailto:lupusrufus@sky.com)

## **The Chatham Historical Society**

Meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month, except January and August, at St Stephen's Church, Maidstone Road, Chatham, ME4 6JE. There is a small car park to the front of the church and access is via Maidstone Road. Alternative parking is available in nearby roads including Maidstone Road. Please do not park in the bus bay; there is disabled parking and step free access to the hall.

Wednesday 11 December 2019 - Christmas Social Evening.  
Wednesday 12 February 2020 - *Cobham Village* - Christoph Bull;  
Wednesday 11 March - *Railways of the Hoo Peninsula* - Ken Reynolds;  
Wednesday 8 April - *Medway's Remarkable Women* - Elaine Gardner;  
Wednesday 13 May - Annual General Meeting.

Doors open at 7:15 pm for a 7.30 pm start; meetings finish at 9:00 pm. All meetings are open to the public, and visitors are very welcome. No need to book; just turn up and pay at the door! Members £1, visitors £3; annual membership is £10 and can be paid on the night. Further information is available at [www.chathamhistoricalsoc.btck.co.uk](http://www.chathamhistoricalsoc.btck.co.uk)

## **Brompton History Research Group**

[www.bromptonhistory.org.uk/](http://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](mailto:bromptonhistoryresearchgroup@gmail.com)



*Elspeth Millar.*

Elspeth is thrilled to have joined the MAC team and her first aim is to apply for Archive Service Accreditation. Administered by the National Archives, it is important that MAC, as a place of deposit, achieves this UK standard. 'It is best practice,' Elspeth explained, and hopes to submit an application for accreditation in about a year's time. Accreditation will help ensure MAC upholds national archive standards, but it will also encourage development and provide support for staff and the work undertaken at the Archive, including engagement with local communities.<sup>2</sup>

Elspeth is clearly excited for the future of the Medway Archives Centre, and it is a vision we are most happy to share!

### Notes

1. <https://www.kent.ac.uk/library/specialcollections/standupcomedy/index.html>
2. <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/archives-sector/archive-service-accreditation/>

## Reminiscence Sessions at the Medway Archives Centre

Helen Worthy



Developing the collections at Medway Archives Centre is an ongoing commitment, and the collection of oral histories forms an important part of the Local Studies collections. Reminiscence sessions not only give us an opportunity to record memories for future generations, thereby contributing to our knowledge and understanding of local history, but also help forge connections with the local community.

To this end, Norma Crowe (see below) and I planned a series of six reminiscence sessions to take place fortnightly in June and July 2019, with the aim of recording the discussions for Medway Archives Centre. Permission was obtained from all participants for their memories to be digitally recorded and for photographs to be taken of the sessions. Participants were also invited to bring along their written memories if they wished, and we received several handwritten documents which will form part of our collections.



There are so many topics to choose from, but eventually we decided upon *High Days and Holidays*, *WWII and Evacuation*, *Winget and Short's*, *Railways Trams and Omnibuses*, *Prefabs and Council Housing*, and *Pubs, Clubs and Restaurants*. We promoted the sessions on our Facebook page\*, through posters in the libraries, and in the council's publicity, and didn't ask people to book, preferring instead to offer a relaxed atmosphere where people could just drop in; this approach seemed popular, with all sessions attracting visitors.

### *High Days and Holidays*

The sessions were friendly and informal, and any initial nervousness about being recorded soon disappeared as people began talking. We had provided ephemera such as photographs, bus timetables and leaflets to stimulate conversation, and were thrilled to see that some people had brought along items of their own to share with

## The Rochester Bridge Trust

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

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](mailto:kesheg@gmail.com)

## Friends of Broomhill

Broomhill Park has been awarded an eighth consecutive Green Flag; the Award recognises the best green spaces in the country.

**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 no dogs allowed in the library. Contact 01634 333720.

**Task Days: Sunday** Task Days are the first Sunday of every month except January, from September to April inclusive, from 10 am to noon. Meet in car park at end of King Arthurs Drive (ME2 3NB). Thursday Task Days are every Thursday morning (all year) concentrating on the Old Orchard renovation, from 10 am to noon. Meet in car park at end of King Arthurs Drive (ME2 3NB). All welcome! Tools provided or bring your own. It's fun, free and healthy!

For further details see our car park notice boards, or visit our website [www.friendsofbroomhill.org.uk](http://www.friendsofbroomhill.org.uk) you can also find us on social media (Facebook, Instagram & Twitter) or contact David Park, Secretary on 01634 718972 email: [secretary@friendsofbroomhill.org.uk](mailto:secretary@friendsofbroomhill.org.uk)

**See the back cover for the latest news!**

## FRIENDS OF CHATHAM TRACTION

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.

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. Further information can be obtained at: [www.friendsof-eastgatehouse.org](http://www.friendsof-eastgatehouse.org) on Facebook on [www.facebook.com/eastgatehouse](https://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](mailto:tzbyszewska@yahoo.co.uk); a copy of the membership form is also available on the website.

The Friends will also have a stall at the Craft Fair during the Christmas Dickens Festival on: Saturday 30th November, Sunday 1st December, Friday 13th, Saturday 14th and Sunday 15th December.

If you have any unwanted jewellery or objets d'art to donate this would be much appreciated. Please contact Sue Haydock on 01634 811172 if you can spare a couple of hours to help on the stall or if you have any suitable items Sue can sell.

## NEW EASTGATE HOUSE BOOK!

### *The Buck Family & Eastgate House*

by FOMA member Pauline Weeds  
£3.50 available from Eastgate House, Rochester.

Further information from Terri Zbyszewska, The Membership Secretary, FoEH,  
31 The Esplanade, Rochester, ME1 1QW or at [tzbyszewska@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:tzbyszewska@yahoo.co.uk)

## The Friends of the Guildhall Museums

[www.friendsoftheguildhall.com](http://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/](http://www.friendsoftheguildhall.com/events/)

## 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](http://www.city-of-rochester.org.uk), where further information on the society, its events and how to join is available. All talks are at The Moat House, 8 Crow Lane, Rochester, ME1 1RF; there is a small charge for events to defray expenses.

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! Tours are 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.

the group. It is clear that the residents of Medway are a rich resource and it is a privilege to learn more about the area's history from them. One important benefit to the Medway Archives Centre was discussions on topics for which we have few resources, and information on lesser-known events, societies and history.

We really enjoyed running the sessions, and found the experience tremendously rewarding. All recorded sessions will be preserved, and it is planned to produce typed transcripts of the recordings. Feedback from the contributors was overwhelmingly positive, and it is clear that the recordings will form an important element of the Local Studies collections at Medway Archives Centre. There were benefits for the participants too: not only did they appreciate the value placed on their memories, but they also enjoyed the social aspect of meeting new people and visiting the centre.

The sessions would not have taken place without the help of our dedicated volunteers and we are indebted to them for helping with greeting our visitors, completing paperwork, recording the sessions, taking photographs, easing the conversation along, supplying biscuits, making teas and coffees and tidying up!

Our next series of reminiscence sessions are already under way, as below, but by the time you read this there may still be an opportunity to take part. Whilst we aim to record people's reminiscences, we also welcome those who would prefer to sit quietly and listen. The sessions are free with a small donation towards the cost of refreshments. Reminiscence sessions begin at 2pm at the Medway Archives Centre:

Tuesday 8 October 2019	Family Life
Tuesday 22 October 2019	National Service
Tuesday 5 November 2019	Chatham and the Royal Navy
Tuesday 19 November 2019	Dockyard Apprentices
Tuesday 3 December 2019	School Days

\*As always, FOMA reposted all the Reminiscence Sessions information on our Facebook page, which can be found at <https://www.facebook.com/fomalsc/>

More photographs of the MAC Reminiscence Sessions can be found on the inside front cover.

### *Eddie Lane*

Norma Crowe

Eddie Lane has been attending our MAC reminiscence sessions and has become a regular. One week he raised the possibility of his meeting the crew of the new HMS



*Medway* when it visited in September. This was because his father, Herbert George Lane, served on the previous *Medway* which was torpedoed in WWII. He was one of the few who survived the attack.

We were able to forward Eddie's request to colleagues who passed it onto the Navy and his wish was granted. I asked Eddie if he would write about his special day, so that an article could go in *The Clock Tower*. Eddie's article follows.

## HMS Medway

Eddie Lane

*Eddie came from a naval family, and is pictured below with HMS Medway. His mum and dad were Herbert and Mary and his elder brother was Ken; his mother was a nurse before her marriage. Eddie was educated at Chatham Technical School as were his dad and brother, and like many of his fellow pupils, he became a Dockyard Apprentice in 1953. Military service beckoned in 1958 but when that was complete he trained as a school teacher and then returned to his old school teaching mainly mathematics and history for 32 years. He is 83 now and lives in retirement in Rainham.*



*Eddie was married to his late wife, Norma for 60 years and they have a son and daughter, Catherine and Michael; he is also a granddad to Rebecca, Dominic, Victoria and Emily. Norma also had a naval connection working for the Admiralty in London, the offices of the electrical department in Chatham Dockyard and for a time she was on the staff of the Commander in Chief, Portsmouth.*

My father, Herbert George Lane joined the Royal Navy straight from Chatham Technical School in 1917. He took the entrance examination successfully which saw him become an artificer apprentice at HMS *Fisgard* in Portsmouth. It was the same examination that apprentices took for entry into Chatham Dockyard and Herbert told me, his younger son, that the English paper had a set book which the pupils studied *Call of the Wild* by Jack London. On completion of his training he became an Engine Room Artificer with the rank of Chief Petty

The Short brothers moved their successful business to Rochester in 1913 due to their interest in developing seaplanes. The *Medway* was an ideal place for testing. The business relocated to Belfast in 1948. We are delighted to now have the model of the Short Mayo Composite (1937) on display in the foyer of MAC (see photograph). We also have a collection of plans, drawings, photographs and ephemera to view by appointment.

32 Bryant Road, Strood, Rochester, Kent, ME2 3EP (previously the old Strood library). Contact our expert team if you require further information on 01634 332714. For further details see the MAC Facebook page [www.facebook.com/malsc/](http://www.facebook.com/malsc/), the FOMA website ([www.foma-lsc.org](http://www.foma-lsc.org)) and Facebook page [www.facebook.com/fomalsc/](http://www.facebook.com/fomalsc/)

If you would like to make a Local Studies donation please e-mail the local studies Librarian at [malsc@medway.gov.uk](mailto:malsc@medway.gov.uk)

Current electoral registers are now at the Medway Archives Centre and can be viewed by appointment; please telephone 01634 332714.

**Please note that due to staffing levels, Medway Archive Centre will only open on Saturdays between the hours of 9.00 – 12.30pm commencing 5th May 2018 until further notice. Opening hours Monday to Friday remain as advertised 9am – 5pm (closed Wednesdays).**

### Christmas opening Hours

- Tuesday 24 December 2019: 9am to 4pm
- Wednesday 25 December 2019: Closed
- Thursday 26 December 2019: Closed
- Friday 27 December 2019: Closed
- Saturday 28 December 2019: 9am to 12.30pm
- Monday 30 December 2019: 9am to 5pm
- Tuesday 31 December 2019: 9am to 4pm
- Wednesday 1 January 2020: Closed

Outside of these days, usual opening hours apply.

The postal address is Medway Archives Centre, 32 Bryant Road, Strood, Rochester, Kent, ME2 3EP.

**Unless otherwise stated, all events take place at the Medway Archives Centre, 32 Bryant Road, Strood, Rochester, ME2 3EP.**

## Eastgate House

Opening hours are Wednesday to Sunday, 10am to 5pm (last admissions 4.30pm); Mondays and Tuesdays CLOSED. For large group visits and special events it may be possible to open the house on Mondays and Tuesdays. Please contact [eastgate.house@medway.gov.uk](mailto:eastgate.house@medway.gov.uk) for further information. Adults: £5.50, Concessions: £4, Under 5s: free, Family Ticket: £15. Groups of 10 or more: 15% discount and school groups: 15% discount on concession price. Friends enter FREE.



## News and Events

### Calendar of Forthcoming Events and Exhibitions

#### Medway Archives Centre

##### Reminiscence Sessions

The final session of the year is Tuesday 3 December - School Days

Sessions begin at 2pm at the Medway Archives Centre:

23 September – 14 January 2020

*Watts Charity in Medway: its Properties and Estates.*

Exhibition in the foyer.



#### Medway Archives Centre Christmas Event

Wednesday 4 December

##### Book Sale

10.30am – 12.30pm

Archives Centre and Foyer

##### Afternoon Talk

2.30 pm

Mary Smith

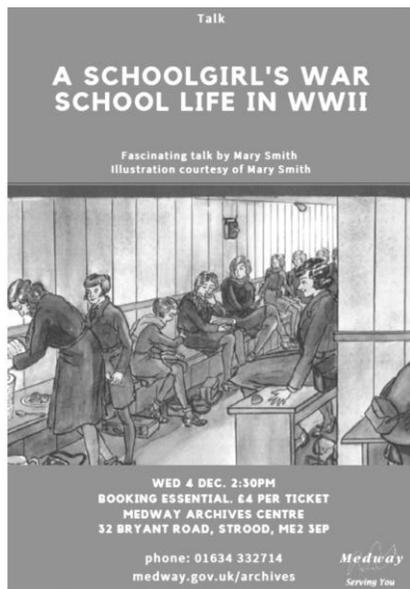
#### *A Schoolgirl's War: the story of a Kent School during World War Two*

During the war a Maidstone Girl's School art teacher recorded aspects of school life in a scrapbook of paintings and drawings. Her pictures are reproduced in Mary Smith's book and in her illustrated talk.

Medway Archives Centre – main hall

Tickets £4 each. Booking essential; telephone 01634 332714.

Image courtesy of Mary Smith



Officer and his trade, coppersmith. He was to stay in the navy until 1945 and his home port would be Chatham.

Before the Second World War he served on several Depot Ships, looking after destroyers or submarines and when the war started he was on HMS *Woolwich*, a Depot Ship. 1941 found him in the port of Tobruk facing the Afrika Korps but he was then posted to HMS *Medway* in Alexandria. With the threat of Field Marshall Rommel a very real one the *Medway*, a submarine depot ship, left Alexandria for safer waters. Despite an escort of destroyers the *Medway* was torpedoed by a German U Boat and sunk in the Mediterranean. The loss of the *Medway* was a blow to the Allies but fortunately for my family and me my dad survived the sinking and was picked up by a destroyer, HMS *Zulu*. Herbert continued to serve and took part in the Battle of the Atlantic on a 'River Class' frigate HMS *Chelmer*. Further postings saw him aboard a Dutch destroyer taken over by the Royal Navy and a minesweeper HMS *Jaseur*. After 28 years Herbert was demobbed from the Royal Naval Barracks Chatham HMS *Pembroke*.

When in the summer of 2019 I heard that the new HMS *Medway* was coming to Chatham to be commissioned I thought I'm sure the crew would like to meet the son of a survivor of the last HMS *Medway* and I made efforts to contact them.

The navy's communications officer in Portsmouth heard about me and I was very pleased when he told me that the Captain of the *Medway*, Commander Ben Porter, wanted me to attend the Commissioning Ceremony and to come on board. On the morning of 19 September the sun was much in evidence as I made my way to number 2 basin, once an integral part of Chatham's Royal Dockyard. The sunshine added to the ceremony about to take place. Seated in the covered area I watched *Medway* be commissioned. The Royal Marine Band, the guests, many resplendent in uniform, the ship's company, all made the occasion a memorable one.

After the ceremony and a friendly chat with the Director of Music of the Royal Marine Band I went on board HMS *Medway*. To my pleasant surprise I was greeted by one of the officers who knew who I was. The next officer I met was the captain. Commander Power took me on to the ship's bridge and we talked about my dad's career in the navy and I showed him some relevant photographs. The captain, however, was called away, leaving me alone on the bridge with the cups of tea that another officer had brought to the C.O. and me. My stay on the command centre of the ship gave me time to collect my thoughts and consider the warm welcome I had been given.

The hospitality didn't stop there because the next invitation was to join the ship's officers in the wardroom. The captain joined us and invited me to tell those present about my dad and the last HMS *Medway*, which I did, fortified by the bottle of lager given to me on my arrival in the ward room. I was shown photographs of Herbert Lane's *Medway* which adorned the walls of the ward room.

It was almost time for me to leave this new warship but I was invited back the following day with the intention of having some photographs taken by the naval photographer who I had met during my stay on the bridge. With the sun still shining I duly returned to HMS *Medway* and was photographed with a smiling officer of the day. What a great reception I had been given!

My invitation and welcome on board was a tribute to my father who faced many dangers in his time at sea during World War Two. I regret that my wife Norma, who died during this year of 2019, couldn't share this occasion. I know she would have been so pleased.



*Eddie Lane with an officer of HMS Medway.*

dockyard and learnt his trade there.

Anyway, between you [Elaine] and Steve you have provided more details to narrow down my search. Thanks for checking a little more for George when the archives open. And if you have any leads, suggestions or contacts with respect to searching dockyard pay records at Kew that would be most welcome.

Murray.

## **Caleb Perfect**

On 23 October, Amanda Thomas reminded readers of FOMA Member Peter Joyce's talk on 8 November entitled *Caleb Perfect - Person, Power And Publishing*. Pete's fascinating article, *St. Nicholas, Stroud - The Tale of the Missing Churchwarden/Vestry Accounts* can be read on page 13. FOMA member, Barry Cox had some other interesting information to add:

26 October 2019.

After Caleb built Strood Workhouse, he had a house built at Shorne Village opposite the Rose and Crown. My brother in law lived over the road from there and was friends with the people who owned it. They gave us a guided tour. Lovely house.

Barry.

Caville Index on the unknown names discovered on the WWI Roll of Honour at St. John's Church, Chatham (see *The Clock Tower*, Issue 55, August 2019). Steve was intrigued by Murray's quest and quickly discovered more information. However, if readers have anything to add, we would be delighted to hear from you.

Elaine Gardner, FOMA Chairman adds the following, which was also forwarded to Murray Wright, and prompted his response of 1 November below:

I started by going through a reel that showed every entry in the register of Freemen of City of Rochester, dated on the day they were admitted and signed by the Mayor and Aldermen present and starting long before George Hanson's dates. It was fascinating reading! It gave name, trade/title and the reason for granting the Freedom, plus the cost - which seemed to be either gratis (as in the case of the eldest son of, or seven year apprenticeship with a Freeman) or £20 and covered every trade you could think of. For example, sailmaker, shipwright, carpenter, bricklayer, fisherman, dredgerman, carter, cordwainer, baker, grocer, and professions such as gentleman (often eldest sons) and doctor. This system continued until 1769 and as it included things like fishing and dredging I think that George would have been listed had he been a Freeman. I also checked the alphabetical index at the end of the film, and again no Hanson.

I found a reel (reference RCA/Y2/I and 2) which had the register of apprentices as they were signed up. Wording started in Latin at the beginning of the 1700s with the year listed in each form as, '... in the second year of the reign of our most glorious Majesty George the second,' or similar which sent me in search of the years in which the Georges reigned! I thought perhaps that if I could find George Hanson as apprenticed to someone I could assume he was probably made a Freeman at the end of it, but sadly nothing there either.

1 November 2019.

Good evening Elaine,

Steve Cross has put a lot of time in researching more of my family tree. He feels quite positive there is a connection/commonality with the George from Strood and the one who appears in Monkwearmouth having family in 1782. There is just a blank spot between 1765 and 1782 where nothing appears in Kent nor in Durham records. There is a William Hanson who married Mary Gibbs (born Strood) in 1759 in Rochester. We feel he may be a brother of George. They had 3 children between early 1760 and late 1761 in Chatham, then no more sign of them. It seems strange they would suddenly stop having children, hence I wonder if they went north to Sunderland. If so young George possibly joined them after 1765 when his father died. If William was living in Chatham he may well have been working at the

## *St. Nicholas, Strood – The Tale of the Missing Churchwarden/Vestry Accounts.*

Peter Joyce



*Pete has lived in the Medway Valley all his life. After suffering a period of ill health in 2012 he took up studies at Canterbury Christ Church University graduating with a BA(Hons) Theology with Religion, Philosophy and Ethics in 2017 and has recently submitted an MA(Research) on Caleb Parfect. When he's not studying or doing Chaplaincy, he can be found on the local golf courses or playing amateur radio.*

One of the problems of working on a subject like the Reverend Caleb Parfect is the separation of the Victorian version of the Church of England that most of us are familiar with from contemporary facts. To achieve this one must build a true picture of the subject through the limited resources that are available. The major problem with this, in reference to Parfect, is that we have only two main resources. The first is Smetham's *History of Strood* and the second is Odette Buchanan's *Two Gentlemen of Strood*, neither of which is contemporary to Parfect. Smetham's is closer but depends on secondary accounts and he relies considerably on Canon Robertson for his fact checking. His work therefore arguably has errors that don't stand up to the rigours of modern scholarship. I would argue that as good and useful as it is, Smetham's account does little more than provide us with the writings of a gentleman historian. This is not to demean the role of gentleman historians and for later periods, certainly some of their writings can be more valuable than the biased white, upper class views of academia. However, for my purposes these were not suitable, and I needed to build a more accurate picture of the economic status of Strood\* at the time of Parfect's ministry.

By this point in my research I was confident that at Cuxton and Shorne the biggest insights to the economic conditions of the communities had been gained by looking at the poor law records and tithe book that are held at MAC, as the other available

data seem to be more speculative and failed to provide an insight into the everyday working people that are the core of any community. However, at Stroud the parish churchwarden accounts that contain the financial information for the time of Perfect are missing from the local archives and according to some were lost by Smetham. However, this appears to be a misunderstanding. Smetham includes a footnote on page 127 of his book that is important: ‘ ... this valuable old book [i.e. the Vestry/Churchwarden Accounts] has been lost ... the hope and desire that it may soon find its way back to its home among the archives of Strood parish cannot be too heartily expressed ... ’ which indicates that Smetham himself had not seen the parish account records. Canon Scott-Robertson notes that when he examined the volume it was in the possession of the antiquarian Humphrey Wickham ‘ ... to whom the residents of Strood owe a great debt for the preservation of many artefacts.’ In 1915 when Henry Plomer transcribed the vestry accounts of the churchwardens of St Nicholas, Strood, 1555-1600 which were later bound with Part II 1603-1662, and published by Kent Archaeological Society in 1927, he drew the information from ADD MSS 36,937. At the time of Plomer’s writing this manuscript containing the vestry records was in the hands of the British Museum’s Department of Manuscripts, which held all the important manuscripts of the nation. This huge collection of manuscripts owes its origin to Sir Hans Sloane, a great collector of manuscripts dating from the fifteenth century to his death in 1753. The collection includes arguably the most important collection of Medieval medical manuscripts known to current scholarship. Upon his death, Sloane’s collection of 3,516 manuscripts was bequeathed to the nation and formed the base collection of the fledgling British Museum. It therefore stands to reason that such an important document as the churchwarden/vestry accounts would be given to them rather than be destroyed.

This manuscript was probably placed in the hands of the British Museum by Mr Humphrey Wood who was the executor of Wickham’s estate and oversaw the sale of goods by Sotheby’s and those donated to the museum. It remains a possibility that as many of the artefacts in Wickham’s estate were bought by the British Museum and preserved for the nation, that these documents were also passed over. However, whilst researching the published works of Perfect, I noticed that many of the available electronic versions of his works are stamped as property of the British Museum and now appear to be in the collections of the British Library. Therefore, I proposed, the collection of artefacts from Wickham’s estate was perhaps considerably larger than had been given credit for. Moreover, further research to understand the bequeaths made to the British Museum from the Wickham estate, may provide the possibility to open a new understanding of *Strood* and would produce one of the most complete churchwarden/vestry accounts in England covering a period of over 460 years.

The next challenge was to prove my hypothesis. Unfortunately, time limitations as well as fiscal considerations meant that long periods of research to trace the whole of the Wickham collection has not yet been possible, but it would be a worthy project for somebody with the resources to undertake it. However, I have been able to

## Before the National Trust/ Cobham Hall

18 September 2019.

Dear Amanda,

I was intrigued by Jean Lear's article (*The Clock Tower*, August 2019) *Before the National Trust* and her list of the visitors to Cobham Hall.

Two names I recognise:

Miss Gunning in 1822: there was a Peter Gunning who married Katherine Baker, eldest daughter of Samuel Baker the builder, in 1814. Perhaps his sister came?

Col D'Arcy in 1820: perhaps the son of General D'Arcy, Royal Engineers who was responsible for the Army for the building of Brompton Barracks in 1804. The builders were the same Samuel Baker and William Nicholson. No doubt the Colonel had his troops there. (Ref. my *The Samuel Bakers, Tradesmen of Kent*, 2009).

Michael Baker.

## George Hanson

20 October 2019.

Dear Readers,

As a new member from far away, I wonder if any kind person could help with a lookup in an Archive microfilm. It seems our Sunderland ancestors may have originated from Strood. George Hanson married Strood girl Anne Husk in 1746. They had children in Strood so he may have been a Medway freeman before his death in 1765. I believe his son George apprenticed at the Dockyard then moved to Monkwearmouth where he was a shipwright.

He may have returned to Chatham with his son George circa 1808 in response for shipwrights to help defend England against Napoleon. After the latter's defeat George from Strood died in Rochester 1816. Any assistance would be appreciated.

Kind regards,

Murray Wright from Auckland (New Zealand, that is ... not Durham).

Amanda Thomas forwarded Murray’s email to Elaine Gardner and Steve Cross, knowing Steve, in particular, was spending time at MAC working for the FOMA De

## Readers' Letters

We welcome letters and emails from readers with their comments. If you have anything you would like to say please write to: Mrs Amanda Thomas, Editor, The Clock Tower, 72 Crabtree Lane, Harpenden, Hertfordshire, AL5 5NS or email at [amanda@ajthomas.com](mailto:amanda@ajthomas.com). The FOMA Secretary often receives queries from members or visitors to the FOMA website, [www.foma-lsc.org/index.html](http://www.foma-lsc.org/index.html). If you have any additional information for the following correspondents, please contact the Editor.

### St John's Church Roll of Honour - John J HARFLEET

11 September 2019.

Dear Elaine,

I have some research on the HARFLETT/HARFLEET family as my aunt married a Henry John HARFLEET.

The spelling variants seem to have happened on a random basis but both have their roots in the 16th century, namely one Robert HALFLETT. The name also being spelled ALFLETT or ARFLETT!

John James **HARFLETT** was born in Chatham 1858 and died 1933 (therefore unlikely to appear on the Roll of Honour). In the 1901 census he was a skilled labourer in Chatham Dockyard. He married Mary DAVIDSON in 1884 and they had three children. The youngest was John Thomas **HARFLEET**, born 31 Aug 1890. Died 1978 Chatham. I have not found any military record for him.

A John Thomas HARFLETT, son of George HARFLETT and Jane (RIGDEN) was born in Chatham 30 April 1886. After a period of service in the army he emigrated to Canada where he married Isabella CRAIG 9 July 1910. They had 3 children before John enlisted in the Canadian Army on the outbreak of the First World War. Sgt John Thomas HARFLETT was killed at Vimy Ridge 15 Sept 1916.

It is possible that the initials J and T could have been confused, as well as the HARFLETT/HARFLEET spelling but the death in 1916 seems to be more appropriate. Possibly the CWGC may be able to help clarify this one.

Regards,  
Michael Jennings.

From Elaine Gardner, FOMA Chairman:

Both local research and the CWGC records confirm that it should be J. T. Harflett on the St John Memorial and John Thomas Harflett is being added to the De Caville Index.

confirm that ADD MSS 36,397 is indeed in the hands of the British Library and can be called to the manuscript room for viewing by those of us lucky enough to have a reader's card. This discovery is very exciting in terms of understanding the economic conditions in Perfect's Stroud and might allow us to gain some valuable insights into the old Stroud workhouse. It is too early to say how much this will change our understanding of the history of the town and much more work will be needed to continue with transcribing the data contained within ADD MSS 36,397. However, already we have the names of various vestry members and, of perhaps greater importance, the name of the actual builder of the old workhouse. On 14 November 1721 a Mr Turner was paid £50-0-0, being the first instalment towards the building of the workhouse. More important to the understanding of the economic condition of Stroud we have enough data to be able to consider and compare the third returns against the neighbouring parishes.

\*I use the spelling Stroud as it is the correct contemporary spelling for Perfect's time. Pre-Perfect the spelling *Stroude* or *Strode* would be correct; after his time the spelling changed to *Strood*. The reasons behind this are unclear, and if anyone can offer a reason, I would be grateful to be enlightened.

#### Editor's Note

The FOMA Committee was delighted when Pete agreed to give a talk to members on 8 November, entitled, *Caleb Perfect - Person, Power and Publishing*. His research will undoubtedly provide scope for further articles and talks in the future!

A fee of £50 for Peter's talk was donated, at his request, to Cuxton's St Michael and All Angels Church's organ restoration fund.



## A Clock Tower Special Feature The Outbreak of World War Two

3 September 1939

Amanda Thomas



At 11.15 am on 3 September 1939, the Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain broadcast on BBC Radio the Declaration Of War with Germany:

“I am speaking to you from the Cabinet room at 10 Downing Street. This morning the British Ambassador in Berlin handed the German government a final note stating that unless we heard from them by 11 o’clock that they were prepared at once to withdraw their troops from Poland, a state of war would exist between us. I have to tell you now that no such undertaking has been received and that consequently this country is at war with Germany.”

I recall that my mother, whose seventh birthday it was, felt frightened on hearing these words, but the announcement was not unexpected. That same day she was evacuated from Strood to Dorking and an extract of her story is included in Odette Buchanan’s compilation below. It is hard to believe over 80 years have passed since that dreadful day.

Over the next few years, just as with World War One, that same process will begin to commemorate World War Two. In anticipation, and as is appropriate for our November issue, we publish here some memories.

### Strood Memories of the Outbreak of World War Two – 3 September 1939

Odette Buchanan

*The following are extracts from Strood Memories of the War that I collected and are yet to be published. Many of the people concerned did not want their names printed so I have just put the following together anonymously.*



“On Sunday, 3 September, a slightly older friend and myself took a neighbour’s baby for a walk – not unusual then – even though we were five and seven. Suddenly a terrible noise happened, which we later got to know as the air raid siren ‘Wailing Willie’.

Russian seamen in the Medway and drunken scenes in the High Street. It begins with an opening chapter looking at how the final summer of peace, 1939, was spent by those who would soon be at the forefront of the coming war fought against Nazi Germany.

The word ‘secret’, is used in its less literal sense, something that is generally not so well known. But, a number of important, and at one time highly secrets are uncovered in this book, including the use of a number of one-time highly confidential documents that tell of how the dockyard was prepared to meet the Cold War enemy and where the dockyard was most vulnerable to an attack by the forces of the Warsaw Pact.

*Secret Rochester*, published earlier this year, looks at both the ancient and modern city, taking to task what was nothing less than a highly profitable scam operated by the medieval monks of the cathedral to generate huge sums of money from an unsuspecting and gullible public. Moving into the twentieth century, the workings of an extremely successful spy ring, centred on Rochester High Street, and working on behalf of the German Kaiser, is carefully explored. Using local contacts, a worryingly list of naval secrets were given to the rapidly expanding pre-World War One German navy. Other secrets explored are the Rochester hideout of James II, secret new aircraft developed at the airport and a guide to the city written by Edwin Drood’s uncle!

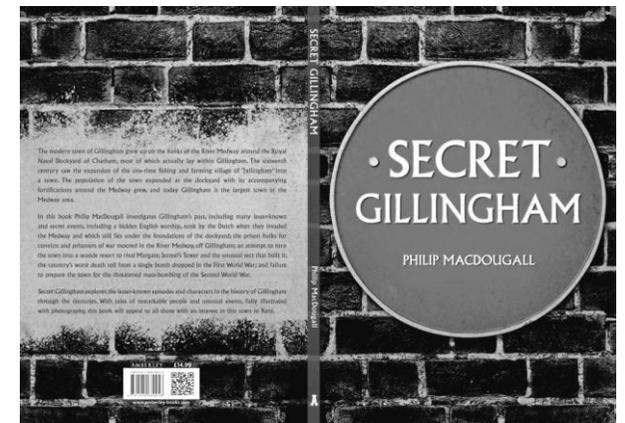
*Secret Gillingham*, the latest in the series, gives thought to a hidden English warship sunk by the Dutch when they invaded the Medway and which is still under the foundations of the dockyard; an attempt to turn the town into a seaside resort to rival Margate; Jezreel’s Tower and the unusual sect that built it; the country’s worst death toll from a single bomb dropped in the First World War; and failure to prepare the town for the threatened mass bombing of the Second World War.

Philip MacDougall’s books are available online and at all good book shops:

*Secret Gillingham:* ISBN 9781445689258 15 November 2019

*Secret Rochester:* ISBN 9781445689098

*Secret Chatham:* ISBN 9781445654904



where the corporal and a few carriers were hiding in the bush, but the bees would not touch them, but followed me and my poor brute of a mare wherever we went. At last she stretched herself out as if she were dead. I did much the same, but to get to work to collect the carriers and drag them back to their loads. Eventually got them off, found my helmet, marched till 4.30 pm.

Recovering from that he wrote to his mother a few days later to tell the tale, adding: rather ignominious wasn't it? One could have had an adventure like that just as well in England as far as the bees were concerned, but I was expecting a lion.

#### Notes

1. AWB 1898 05 08 from Jebba. The Maxim gun, an American invention later infamous in WW1, weighed about 60 kg and fired a 0.45 inch round, automatically reloading itself.
2. Ibid 1898 05 15. It was a Lt Headlam of the Marines who was drowned.
3. AWB 1898 05 17 from Jebba and 1898 05 25 finished 29 May.
4. AWB 1898 06 21 from Kishi and diary D11.



## Books for Christmas

Amanda Thomas

Books are the perfect stocking filler and in this issue of *The Clock Tower* we are delighted to showcase the work of FOMA member Philip MacDougall (pictured). Philip is the author of the *Secret* series, titles which reveal all sorts of interesting information about places in the Medway Towns, as Philip explains:



Mid-November [2019] saw publication of *Secret Gillingham*, the third in a series of books on lesser known aspects of the history of the Medway Towns. *Secret Chatham* and *Secret Rochester* have already been published. I have been writing about Medway since the late-1970s, having now seen publication of some twenty books on the area.

*Secret Chatham* tells of political riots in the nineteenth century, the selfless devotion by duty of a Chatham naval surgeon in quelling the outbreak of gaol fever among

We raced back down Lynette Avenue, taking the baby to his mother who had dashed out to meet us.”

\*\*\*

“I was just 12 years old when war broke out. The unknown was frightening; as war was announced on the radio, fear seemed to flow through my veins instead of blood.”

\*\*\*

“The Second World War broke out on my 7<sup>th</sup> birthday, 3<sup>rd</sup> September, 1939. I had realised for a while that there were troubles ahead and I had watched with interest whilst the Anderson Shelter was installed in our back garden in Strood earlier in the year and had also accepted my gas mask with keen interest.

What I hadn't expected was that on my birthday I was going to be taken away from my home and school, evacuated to a business associate of my father in Dorking, Surrey. I sat in my father's car looking at my feet: I had desperately wanted some black patent leather shoes with ankle straps for my birthday and to my delight they were one of my presents. I decided that as they were so beautiful I would concentrate my mind on them and wouldn't think about what was actually happening ... ”

\*\*\*

“My sister Irene and I were evacuated to Higham. The sirens immediately sounded but the planes over the Medway were French. We didn't like where we were so mother pushed the baby in the pram over the hill and collected us back home. What a wicked experience for everyone – Kids of Hell Fire Corner, Kent.”

\*\*\*

“I was six when the war broke out and living at 79 Brompton Lane. We went there in 1937 and I retained the house until 2002.”

\*\*\*

“I was 17 years old and living in Strood. I had just married a regular soldier. After five weeks he was sent to Dunkirk and was missing for six months, believed killed. I later discovered that he was in fact alive and after five years as a POW (Prisoner of War) he returned home to me.”

\*\*\*

Odetta concludes: I have a feeling I've told you all about my memory of 3<sup>rd</sup> September, 1939 before but in case you've forgotten I'll tell you again. I was three years old. We'd been to St Ives in Cornwall on holiday and were returning to London. I was sat on my mother's lap in the back of the car. As we were going towards London there was a steady stream of cars leaving. People kept leaning out and shouting at us, “Turn round – war's been declared!” My father ignored them. It must have been a day or two later - I remember an air raid siren going off (I still come out in goose bumps when I hear them) and people came in our house off the road to shelter!

## A Letter from World War Two

Michael Baker

I have been sorting some of my grandfather, Sir Herbert Baker's letters from World War Two. To follow is a transcribed sample from 1940 which was a poor copy of a round-robin from Herbert to his children; this specifically to Mrs E. Rawnsley. It was written at Owllets, the Baker family home, which is situated to the north west of Cobham.



Owllets August 12 1940

Dear Eleanor,

You will like to know our happenings in these exciting times, We have been outside the intense activity of battle over the S. Eastern count[r]ies.<sup>1</sup> As the bulletin has it, but not entirely. Night and day, bombs have bumped down on the neighbourhood, 2, 5, 8 miles away; but last week 4 fell at midnight, 2 between our garden and the village church and 2 in the hop garden where we walk most days. I calculate that if dropped one second earlier the first two might have hit the church. The one that fell in Battle Street, near where the cromleck called by tradition the Warrior's Grave used to be, fell a few yards from the Arnolds' house,<sup>2</sup> smashing all windows but trees stopped most splinters, some of which reached as far as here. These were chance hit and run raids at night; others have popped out of cloudy skies by day and are more accurate in aim.

Ann has netted our windows which will prevent the glass daggers flying. Alfred has and is having a hot time; he treats lightly of it to us, and enjoys no doubt watching the mad fights in the air. He saw 3 flaming down in the field in his glasses, but at the harbour's mouth he is an object of the bombs and courage is tested. He says one feels so big!

These channel air fights seem victories, but we don't really know what our shipping losses are, indirect as well as direct.

To keep alive Alfred's mind and spirit – and mine – we are translating French poetry together, the bits so far in Bridges' Spirit of Man. I know so little, or no, French but he knows much poetry by heart. The early poems are hard to put into rhythm and get the sense.

We have just heard the adventures of one who escaped, twice after recapture, faked a passport and calmly bicycled to Switzerland. And thence bussed to Spain. But his interest was that the German airman fears our airman, thinks we have a killing ray! Long may they think so or make that excuse for fear of our men.

Exciting here with air activity overhead, wondering if they are guarding us or going off to a fight. They go off in threes but sometimes return in twos and we fear. Yesterday some played pranks near the clouds here, a mock battle we thought.

Alfred could also poke a bit of fun at his professional brother: *Nothing else to do but build houses. I shall soon rival Bert as an architect. They certainly let the water through but their style is unrivalled.*



*Sketch of hut from Alfred's later letter of August 6.*

Final orders to go were received on June 11<sup>th</sup>. His diary recorded the order: *Capt. Baker will now proceed to Kishi to recruit Hausas on the southern border of Borgu. They crossed the river and set off the next day: 2 officers, 2 white NCOs, one black corporal, 32 carriers, with kit and a month's rations, 4 servants, 5 ponies. Rode a mare I paid £10 for and took Lucifer. Our route here lay through a forest entirely uninhabited and except for a couple of ruined villages up this end and a slave raiders' track used for sacking them, there is no sign of man for no one has ever been through it. Plenty of signs of other things though: elephant, lion, buffalo, antelope of all sorts ... . I got a couple of buck (oribi), most excellent venison. The water was dirty: the two things I longed for most were bread and water. The forest was not the least like the lower part near the coast, more like an English coppice.*<sup>4</sup>

His diary picks up the thread at 11 am on June 16<sup>th</sup>: *I was riding last as rearguard. I saw the Shonga coolies (who as usual were right behind the others and had to be driven all the way) throw down their loads and rush away into the bush. Cpl Hutchins who was riding with them came galloping back. I asked him what was the matter and he did not know! I thought they were either deserting or had come on a lion (we had seen tracks not far off). I loaded my rifle (meaning to shoot in either case) and rode up. I soon found my mistake as arriving on the spot my mare and myself were attacked by a swarm of bees, who looked upon us as the cause of all the trouble. They attacked our heads going principally for the eyes, ears, nose and mouth. The mare in her agony threw herself down. My helmet came off and my foot got caught in the stirrup. The sole of my left boot being half off, it jammed in the stirrup so that my only way to get free was to tear off the sole. For 10 minutes we struggled, sometimes up, sometimes down. I twisted my knee but managed to keep the mare from bolting. This kept both hands busy and the bees held undisputed possession of my face. Eventually I got clear and put my coat over my head which was covered with blood. It took a long time to get clear of the bees though. I got to*

## 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 this 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 13: Nigeria, 1898 (iv)

Though told not to give military information in private letters, Alfred wrote on May 8<sup>th</sup>: *I probably start at daybreak tomorrow with one subaltern, two Maxim guns and two months' rations in HMS Jackdaw, a river gunboat, 2 days journey to Badgibo. I leave the river for Gongekoko. Last letter for a long time.*<sup>1</sup> But a week later he wrote again from Jebba: *still here as the Maxims have not come. We surmise the gunboat stuck in the lower river, 12 days overdue. That was not the only hazard; a subaltern newly arrived went to bathe when it was nearly dark. He was seen to dive in by a black boy and not come up again. We found his body in about an hour before the crocodiles. He had hit his head against a rock, stunned himself and was drowned.*<sup>2</sup>

In this letter he realised too that both his brothers Lionel and Herbert were home from South Africa, that he had missed writing to them: *I've seen so little of Bert.*

By May 16<sup>th</sup> however, Lugard had arrived and the guns too. *The guns go on tomorrow, but I have got a far better billet and go the day after. I go past them as I believe Chief Political Officer at the extreme front, beyond Boussa and behind the French. My duties are to watch the French, recruit Hausas and buy horses. I go by canoe with one Hausa sergeant for recruiting purposes. A week later: delayed by political developments, ready to start at a moment's notice for Yalma beyond Boussa. I march the whole way avoiding the river, with a white doctor, an escort of 10 mounted infantry and 3 months rations. By the 29<sup>th</sup> his target was Kishi to the west not Yalma, since arguments with the French had eased.*<sup>3</sup>

Despite the heat, the excitement and the stop-go changes, Alfred still enjoyed himself, *went across river to shoot guinea fowl for breakfast, met a leopard in the open and bagged it. I am sending the skin to Rowland Ward to send on to you. In early June: got a touch of fever, but got rid of it. Still keep my reputation as the fittest looking man in W. Africa. I feel it too.*

“Scatter themselves and madly sweep the sky like Shakespeare's choughs.”

He had 2 attempts to escape by sea. His ship was sunk by enemy fire; next the boat they had rigged themselves sank. He said the German private who arrested them was nice to them and abused his own officers.

Hard at the harvest, none yet burnt by bombs as feared; they fear reprisals I expect. Our parson went to Hastings for a holiday, was watching bowls when an air raid warden told them to go to shelter. They refused. Drake went on and they would. He marvelled at the coolness of the people.

Florence and Ann and all very busy bottling bumper fruit crop within sugar limits. Allaire and his bride for weekend; very happy and he is a changed man, hoping for good prices for his apples.

[Hand written to Eleanor Rawnsley only:]

How true lazy people give themselves most trouble: copying a general letter badly: you won't read it. What shall I do!

Alfred just arriving before his time; glad as Dover not a very safe place; more when we have seen him.

[By FB:]<sup>3</sup> If Alfred gets 7 days leave he would love to see you but it could not be till after the 26<sup>th</sup> as other subaltern is due for his 7 days first. Horrid time at Dover with raids but he smiles. F

#### Notes

1. Text: countries, but surely counties?
2. The Arnolds lived at Meadow House, Cobham.
3. 'FB' is Florence Baker (née Edmeades), Michael's grandmother and wife of Sir Herbert; she signed herself 'F'.



### An Appeal to FOMA Members for Further Information!

Betty Cole

I have always been interested in a fact about evacuation. I can't remember where I got this from but I have been told that many children were not 'reclaimed' by their families. Obviously, many because their family had been killed in the bombings but I was told that some parents just left their children with the people who had taken them in. Do readers know of any such incidences?

If you would like to comment or contribute please write to The Editor, Amanda Thomas (see page 46 for details). Further information on World War Two in *The Clock Tower* on the inside back cover.

## Voices from the Dockyard

Betty Cole and Norma Crowe



At the Volunteers' meeting in April 2018, MAC's Local Studies Librarian, Norma Crowe asked for people to transcribe some letters written in the 1970s by former Chatham Dockyard workers and published in the *Evening Post* in January and February 1973. The letters contained memories of life in the Yard earlier in the 1900s and some of the more amusing and interesting will be reproduced in *The Clock Tower* in this new series. Please note that the names of the authors of the letters have been omitted to protect their privacy, and the letters are unedited transcriptions. Our thanks to Betty Cole, Norma Crowe and the volunteers.



*Chatham Dockyard taken on 18 March 1970 from nearby flats and published in the Evening Post; Medway Archives Centre, ref: CHA/AN/DYD/AV/7.*

## Tricks of the Trade

### A Trick

29 January 1973

Dear Sir,

With reference to your feature on stories from and about the Dockyard Maties, I can

public recreation ground. The City Corporation had received the approval of the Local Government Board to borrow the £4,200 to cover the acquisition by 1914. However, events then took a strange turn of events, for the Corporation was informed that an anonymous *citizen* had purchased the land from the War Office and had presented it to the City under a deed of gift, to be held as a public open space for the benefit of the citizens.

14 May, 1914 was the day the New Road Recreation Ground, as it was to be known, was taken over by the City, and a dedication ceremony was held that afternoon the same day as the opening of the new bridge across the River Medway by Lady Darnley. The Chairman of the Education Committee gave the elementary school children a half day holiday to celebrate the occasion and they duly attended the opening ceremony of the recreation ground. The generous benefactor still wished to remain anonymous, but an editorial in the *Chatham, Rochester and Gillingham News*, for that day stated, '... one need not but go far beyond his Worship (the mayor) to discover the gentleman who has conferred such an inestimable benefit upon the city, I may of course be mistaken.' He wasn't, for some time later it was revealed that it was indeed the Mayor of the City, Cllr. John Howard Jackson who was the generous benefactor.



*The opening ceremony; Medway Archives Centre, Couchman Collection, ref., DE402/10/15(L).*

At the opening ceremony the Mayor and Mayoress offered £100 and £50 respectively towards a public fund to raise £1,500 to improve the grounds and provide recreational facilities. However, the outbreak of war with Germany in August of that fateful year put such thoughts on hold.

In the next instalment we shall find out more about Cllr. Jackson and how the recreation ground was later developed.

## What and Why?

### Jackson's Recreation Ground, Rochester.

Kevin Russell



*Kevin Russell is a member of the FOMA committee and The City of Rochester Society. In the summer months Kevin is a volunteer guide in Restoration House, Rochester. He is interested in local history and trams and trolleybus systems of the UK, both old and new.*

### Part One

Jackson's Recreation Ground lies to the south side of the New Road, Rochester. On its Western boundary is City Way, formerly Pattens Lane, to the east is the boundary with Chatham, and the University of the Creative Arts and Fort Pitt Grammar School, both which occupy much of the site of the nineteenth century fort of that name.

The grounds cover some 21 acres (9 hectares) and are some 22 metres above sea level on its northern boundary with New Road, rising steeply to approximately 50 metres above sea level on its southern boundary. Extensive views can be obtained over Rochester, to Strood and Frindsbury and down the River Medway to the former Royal Naval Dockyard at Chatham, to Upnor and to the east to Fort Amhurst, and the Naval War Memorial on the Great Lines at Gillingham and as such has always been a popular place for recreation. Much of the topography of the land reflects its former use as extensive defensive earthworks linking Fort Pitt with Delce Tower 400 metres to the west.

As far back as 1865, Rochester Corporation had been desirous of obtaining fields adjoining the Napoleonic Fort Pitt for use as a public park. Indeed a council minute, dated 21 August, records that the Secretary of State for War was asked for a grant of such lands, a request not granted. However, the land now forming both Fort Pitt Gardens and Jacksons Recreation Ground was by 1871 held under a short tenancy from the War Department as a public recreation ground at an annual rental of £56, the War Department being requested that the Council be approached if ever the land was to be put up for sale. The fields formed part of the surviving defensive earth works on the south side of the New Road between the fort and Delce Tower to its western boundary of Pattens Lane.

By 1909 the War Department had agreed to sell and negotiations entered into with the Corporation which gave an undertaking that the land was always to be used as a

recall quite a lot of incidents during my time in the "Yard". I served 44 years altogether, 5 yrs in the Naval Store dept. and 39 years as a wireman in the Electrical department. When Sheerness Dockyard was closed, most of the personnel were transferred to Chatham. They used to come by train every day.

Among the new ones was an inspector who used to be a Shipwrights' inspector, but on transfer, was brought into the Electrical Dept, as an Electrical Dept. Inspector. One day we knew that he was making a tour of the ships to see the progress of work. I was doing a wiring job in a cabin on a cruiser at the time, and I and my mates decided to try him out.

I found an old mincing machine and screwed it on the bulkhead, [sic] just above a deck-tube, and put a piece of lead-cased cable into the top of the deck-tube and fixed the other end in the bottom of the mincer. I put one metal clip on the cable to hold it in position, and we waited for his visit. In due course he arrived, and we busied ourselves on our respective tasks, but watching his reaction. After walking round and inquiring as to progress of work etc. he paused in front of the "object". He gazed at it, then moved forward and slowly turned the handle. He then stepped back, gazed rather suspiciously at it, and then, without a word, left the compartment.

My mates and I often talked about the incident, and wondered what he really thought about it.

### The Rabbit

19 January 1973

As many "Maties" are aware, a job for oneself, done in "Yard-time" & with "Yard" materials, is called a "Rabbit".

One morning I brought in a rabbit (furry variety) for my mate, who didn't arrive. Rather than leave it in the "Shop" because of the rats, I decided to take it back home till the next morning.

Wrapping it in newspaper, I put it in a basket on my bike, & walked to Pembroke Gate, where I was "Tapped" & directed to the Search Room. Running over my pockets, the Policeman then glanced at my carrier & said "what's in the basket; not a "Rabbit" I hope". "Well," I answered, "as a matter of fact, it is a 'Rabbit'." "Well, at least, you're honest about it" he said, "I'll call the Sergeant." The Sergeant said "another Rabbit, eh; you blokes never learn, do you, open the parcel."

Slowly I began; the Policemen's faces were a study as a pair of long ears appeared

then a furry head, & two front legs. “Why!” said the Sergeant, “its [sic] a rabbit”. “That’s what I told the constable,” I said.

The Sergeants face grew redder & redder, then he roared, “Get out of here, mate”. Though these were not quite the words he used.

Till the day I retired, that Sergeant gave me a very wary look as I walked through Pembroke Gate.

## More Stories

29 January 1973

Dear Sir,

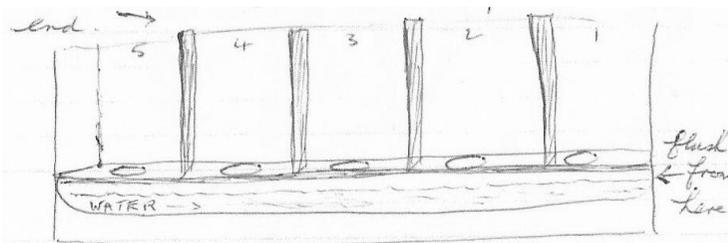
Here are a few memories of the Dockyard, which may interest you.

### The Dockyard Police

In the olden days the Dockyard was guarded by the METROPOLITAN POLICE. My father (P.C.107) came from the “R” Division of the London Metropolitan Police to Chatham Dockyard round about 1888. The single policemen were housed in the Police Section House in the Dockyard. They were very conscientious and strict about their duties. Smoking was forbidden and all pipes, cigarettes and matches were to be left at the gates on entry into the Yard. But cigarette papers, tobacco, matches, and the striking side of a matchbox used to be concealed in various places in the clothes. The men used to go into the lavatories for a quick “draw”, and the policemen used to stand hidden, and watch for the smoke to float up above the walls of the lavatory, then they would pounce. One particularly keen “rozzler” was known as P.C.49 - he was one to be dodged. All elderly ex-maties will also remember Detective Inspector Cousins. I dare not record what some sailors did to him!

### Now – the Lavatories

The very primitive [sic] toilets were a series of seats partitioned off but the receptacle was one long iron trough, which was flushed about every ¼ hour, from one end.



after the four o'clock service, play in London in the evening and return the next morning for the ten o'clock service. It was a hard schedule ...'

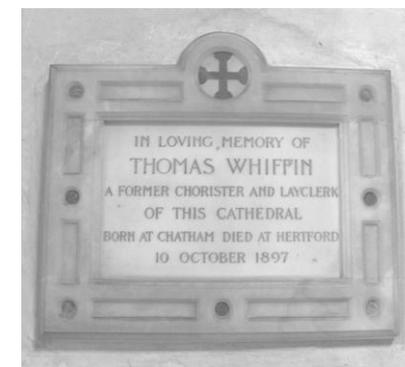
In America it is interesting to note that both Thomas and Blanche were not originally engaged to play parts in *Pinafore*. Blanche says, ‘we counted six companies playing the Opera in New York City at the same time, all pirated companies as ours.’ When Gilbert and Sullivan arrived with their English company and ‘the rivalry became hot’, she writes:

‘The English company proved to have better singers than we had, but the actor who played Sir Joseph Porter suffered by comparison with my husband. All the other Sir Josephs burlesqued the part, but Tom played it sincerely, quietly and unctuously. It is interesting to note that there was some talk of having Richard Mansfield play Sir Joseph Porter, but he had a disagreement with Mr. Duff [the impresario] and my husband was given the part. ... It was just a matter of luck that I happened to create the part of Buttercup, for I was called in at the last moment because of the sudden illness of the actress assigned to the role. I rehearsed Monday and Tuesday and played Wednesday night. I’ll never forget that opening. I did not think the play was a hit, at first. But after Mr. Whiffen came off as Sir Joseph Porter, we knew from the applause and shouting that all was well.’

Later, *The Mikado* was premiered in America and Thomas sang Pooh-Bah. Sullivan, now a ‘Sir’, came over. ‘He looked up my husband and said, “Whiffen, you’re not going to sing in this company against me, are you? Why, man, they’re still not paying us any royalties.”’ Tom’s contract had to be honoured, so he could not bow out. The dinner mentioned earlier went ahead, so clearly there were no hard feelings. Eventually,

‘After my dear husband’s death, I remembered how dearly he loved and revered Rochester Cathedral where he had sung in the choir, as boy and man for many years-and the thought came to me of how much I should like to have some memorial to him in the Cathedral. I knew this would be a difficult matter, but with perseverance, after a time, I was able to realize my wish, and had a small tablet to his memory placed in the lovely old Cathedral of which he was so fond.’

My search for this was initially in vain, because it is not with the other music memorials on the south side of the screen, nor with Joseph Maas’s memorial in the south transept, but I should have read Blanche’s words more carefully, for she herself describes exactly where it is: above the stairs leading down to the crypt.



*The plaque in Rochester Cathedral to Thomas Whiffen.*

‘ ... after Mr Whiffen’s voice broke he went as a clerk in the Clearing House in London where he clerked for about three years [from 1850], but he could not stand the confinement of indoors. Hearing of a tenor position in the cathedral of Lichfield, he was given a trial which proved to be successful.’

When the Rochester post of his uncle became vacant in the summer of 1855 he returned there ‘for sentimental reasons’. Staff at the Staffordshire Record Office kindly searched in the Lichfield cathedral records for me, but found no sign of him there. Also, after his voice trial the *Windsor and Eton Express* stated rather that he had been at ‘Ely’, but again a search of the Ely records (now in Cambridge University Library) has drawn a blank. Where was he? ‘For three years Mr. Whiffen served in Rochester’ is another Blanche error, for the records show him being paid only from September 1855 to November 1856.

Blanche shows that the Whiffen family were known to Charles Dickens. She writes: ‘Near Gads’ Hills, Rochester, Mr. Whiffen met the immortal Charles Dickens and came to know him very well. Dickens made the name of Whiffen famous in “Pickwick Papers,” into which he introduces the fat town crier of Eatanswill as Whiffen ... The Whiffen thus immortalized was Thomas Whiffen’s grandfather.’ Blanche also mentions a meeting in Rochester shortly before they moved to America, where she was introduced to Dickens by her husband:

‘We encountered him on a little flowery lane in Rochester, driving along in a basket carriage, and he pulled up to say “Dalby tells me you are going to America.” Mr. Whiffen answered in the affirmative, whereat he remarked with a twinkle, “I hope you’ll make as much money over there as I did.” We laughed at that, for we poor actors had no reason to expect such good fortune, as he had, during the five months he was there, made a hundred thousand dollars.’

Whiffen’s prowess as a violinist also stood him in good stead, for

‘ ... as soon as he came to Windsor he was made a member of the Queen’s Private Orchestra, which played in the Queen’s drawing-room every evening after dinner, at Windsor castle, during the summer months. ... He was paid about seventy pounds a year and they gave him a house in the cloisters and furnished him with coal. Many an amusing story my husband used to tell about the Queen’s little eccentricities during those concerts, one of them being her aversion to a draught. They were a positive horror to her and she would even stop the orchestra, in the middle of a selection, to find that draught and close it out before she could listen to the music with any comfort.’

His translation to an acting career is explained by Blanche:

‘Mr Whiffen sang in the Chapel at ten in the morning and at four in the afternoon, and one day, Mr. German Reed, happening to hear him sing, was so impressed that he wanted him for the small operas he was just introducing in England. ... When it came to playing in London, Tom had to leave the Chapel

Now, a favourite pastime was to put a bundle of paper on the water, (or even a bundle of oil-soaked waste), in No. 1 seat, when we knew there was somebody sitting on No. 4 or 5 – when the flush started, the paper was lit, and so it floated along towards the other end (No. 4 or 5), and you can imagine the yells when the “heat” passed under the “sitter” on No. 4 or 5!!

### Boiling Up

For the morning breakfast break (about 8 to 8.30 A.M. in the olden days), the “maties” used to use tin cans with a wire handle, and we used to boil the water on a rivet fire, using long iron hooks. We had our tea and sugar already mixed in a paper bag, to put in as soon as the water boiled. We all

used to stand round the fire, while the rivet boy would keep watch for the sight of a chargeman, inspector or foreman, who might appear at any moment. When this happened we would have to snatch our can off the fire and “scarper”, but often it was too late, and we would have to leave our cans, and then watch the chargeman, or inspector empty all the cans, and leave us to sort them out when he’d gone.

Sometimes somebody’s water would boil over, so that would cause a lot of ash to fly up, so you generally had coke dust in your tea!

I can recall many amusing incidents during my 44 years as a “MATIE”, and also tragic incidents, which occurred during the war years. 92 bombs fell inside the Dockyard walls during the Second World war, but all that is another story.

### Now The Trams

Mention has been made about the rush for the 1/2d (ha’penny tram) [see *The Clock Tower*; Issue 55, August 2019] the first one in the row, and the one furthest from the Pembroke Gate.

One of the men who always came first in the “race” was a shipwright named Charlie Pay. He was a member of the old City of Rochester Athletic Club, and a champion sprinter. As time passed on he noticed that there was a young lad who also ran for the first tram, and he used to keep almost level with Charlie. Charlie was interested, so one day he said to the lad, “Do you know, you’re a darnn good runner – Come up to the Vines training ground some time, and we’ll put the stop-watch on you.” (The Vines was the Kings School cricket and training ground just off the Vines, near Rochester Castle). The City of Rochester A.C. used the ground for training. I myself, was also a member, but I was a long distance walker.



In due course the lad arrived at the ground one evening, stripped off for action, and got running round the track. Jack Payne was the timekeeper with the stop-watch, and we all watched the trial. He was good this lad, and after the times were confirmed, we signed him on as a member. That lad was George Robertson, who became one of the best runners for the City of Rochester A.C., winning many trophies and County Championship medals for the Club and KENT.

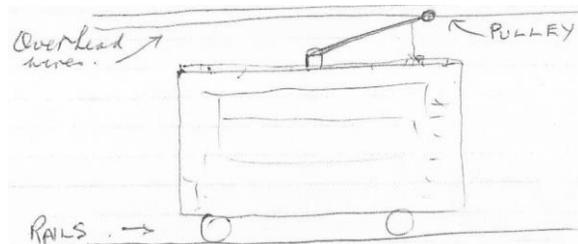
As I mentioned, I myself was a long-distance walker, and many a time, while in training for the LONDON-TO-BRIGHTON WALK (which I did 20 times, 20 years in succession). I used to walk right round the Dockyard during my dinner hour (or 1 1/2 hrs as it used to be, in the olden days). Going alongside the river from No.9 Dock, up to the boundary of the GUN WHARF, back past the Main Gate, down past the Power Station, Alexandra Gate, then the Pembroke Gate to the lower end near the Gillingham Gate, round the locks at the “Bull’s Nose”, and back to No.9 Dock. It used to take me about an hour, and I estimate the distance around 5 miles.

### The Shipwrights

Many old maties will recall a shipwright whom we called “PONTO”. He used to collect any unwanted sandwiches or food left lying about. But shipwrights in the olden days, were always reputed to be “half-starved”. The story goes that a shipwright went up to the Dockyard surgery and complained that he was constipated. He hadn’t been to the toilet for 3 days. The Dockyard Surgeon said “What are you?” The man said “A shipwright” - The surgeon said “H’m – That accounts for it. Go home and have a damn good meal!”

### The Trams – again

My brother (“Peter” Scott) was a conductor on the old TRAMS. As you may know, the electric power came from the overhead wires, down the “power arm”, to the power control at the front (or back) of the tram.



He used to tell a story about an old lady who asked him, “If I put my foot on the rail will I be electrocuted?” My brother replied “No lady – Not unless you put your other foot on the overhead wire!”

Well, I am sorry I have taken up your valuable time with such a diatribe, and I hope you will excuse the scribble, but perhaps you may find something of interest among my more than 250 words of MEMORIES OF THE MATIES.

I have enclosed a little sketch of the bewildered inspector [not included] and the “secret” weapon!

## *Lives of Rochester Cathedral Choristers*

Dr. Andrew Ashbee

*Dr Andrew Ashbee was born and bred in Snodland. The former Head of Music at Rochester Grammar School for Girls, Dr Ashbee is internationally known for his work on Tudor and Stuart music and musicians, especially the Maidstone composer John Jenkins. He is the Honorary Curator of Snodland Millennium Museum and the Chairman of Snodland Historical Society.*



### A footnote for Thomas Whiffen

Sally Whiffing, a FOMA member who also leads research into the Whiffen family, responded to my first article on the Chatham Whiffens (see *The Clock Tower*, Issue 54, May 2019) and we have since exchanged further information. She has now very kindly alerted me to the presence of Blanche Whiffen’s autobiography which can be found at <https://archive.org/details/keepingofftheshe010807mbp/page/n8>. This is delightful to read and adds fascinating details to my account of Thomas Whiffin in the August *Clock Tower*. Nevertheless, a few of Blanche’s statements need to be questioned, particularly concerning Thomas’s early years – she did not meet him until around 1865, so she may have misheard or misunderstood some details. For instance: Sir Arthur Sullivan was not a chorister at Rochester as Blanche states. He sang in the Chapel Royal between 1854 and 1858, yet the two were certainly friends. Blanche writes of them all dining in New York in later years and ‘they kept me laughing all through that dinner as they brought up memories of the old days at Rochester.’ Telling of her marriage to Tom at St. Andrew’s, Wells Street, on 11 July 1868, she writes:

‘Mr Whiffen had sung in the choir there at some previous time, so we had a choral wedding. The church was packed, and several prominent men, John Parry [a famous harpist and actor/singer] amongst them, put on surplices and sang in the choir. Arthur Sullivan wrote a new anthem for the occasion.’

The only anthem of Sullivan known to have been written that year was *Rejoice in the Lord, O ye righteous*, for the wedding of Rev. Robert Browne-Borthwick at Westminster Abbey on 16 April 1868. It was certainly new and may have been repeated for the Whiffen wedding, or is there an unpublished Sullivan anthem yet to be discovered? St Andrew’s was only 20 years old and a fashionable High Church foundation. It gained fame because of its superb fittings by some of the most illustrious artists of the day: Pugin, Butterfield, William Burgess, and others. In the 1930s it was moved entirely to a new site at Kingsbury, Middlesex. A mystery has also arisen regarding Tom’s initial post as a Lay Clerk/Vicar Choral. Blanche notes that