

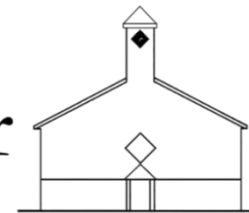
Farewell to Norma



The FOMA Committee gathered on 7 July 2021 at the Medway Archives Centre to say goodbye to Local Studies Librarian, our friend Norma Crowe. Read more on page 4. Here FOMA Chairman, Elaine Gardner presents Norma with a bouquet and Honorary FOMA Life Membership; photograph by Rob Flood.

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

The Clock Tower



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The FOMA Committee gathered on 7 July 2021 at the Medway Archives Centre to say goodbye to Local Studies Librarian, our friend Norma Crowe. Read more on page 4. From left to right: Rob Flood, Jean Skilling, Len Feist, Norma Crowe, Elaine Gardner; photograph by Rob Flood, kindly taken by MAC staff.

ALSO INSIDE

Eastgate House Memories

Peter Cook looks back at WWII and Medway in 1941 – 80 years ago this year.

PLUS

The 1951 Festival of Britain – do you remember the Rochester Pageant? See page 8.

Jean Skilling Appointed FOMA Treasurer



We were absolutely delighted to welcome back Jean Skilling as Treasurer at the FOMA AGM in June following the retirement of Josie Iles. Many of you will recall Jean was FOMA's very first Treasurer, appointed in 2006 until she retired in the spring of 2014. During her time as Treasurer Jean oversaw the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) Grant project which began in January 2009 and continued until 2012. The grant of up to £154,500 from the HLF to FOMA was a significant moment in our organisation's history and made available for research the (hitherto unseen) contents of some 500 boxes of the Rochester City Archives – the so-called *Archives of Great Expectations*. The largest in the Medway area, this archival collection covers the years 1227 to 1974 and includes maps, photographs, building plans, heraldic and manorial records, records of land use, title deeds, rate books, records of trade and industry, public health, and transport.

Jean writes: 'I have been a resident of the Medway Towns since childhood and worked as an accountant for Kent County Council before taking early retirement. I was FOMA's inaugural Treasurer working with Stephen Dixon on the successful HLF bid before handing over the reins to Josie Iles a few years later. I am also Treasurer of Kent Family History Society and the City of Rochester Society, and I am delighted to be back working with FOMA and the Medway Archives!'

The Rochester Pudding

A recipe for Rochester Pudding has recently been uncovered at the Medway Archives Centre (MAC) from *The Chatham News*, published in March 1939. The discovery captured everyone's imagination and inspired FOMA's Elaine Gardner to have a go at making it – and very nice it was too! MAC's Helen Worthy is hoping to persuade Café Nucleus or Peggotty's Parlour in Rochester to give it a go. It would certainly be popular and a great advertisement for the Archives as well. Fingers crossed!

I wonder how many Rochester people know that a pudding has the same name as their ancient City. This pudding was the subject of an article in the ladies' page of "The Daily Telegraph" this week, and the writer stated: "Rochester pudding is such an excellent light steamed pudding that it deserves to be rescued from oblivion." The following recipe is given:—"Take 2oz. butter, 2oz. castor sugar, 2oz. plain white flour and one egg, two tablespoonfuls of golden syrup and $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoonful salt. Put butter into a mixing bowl and beat it with the back of a wooden spoon till creamy. Beat in sugar.

Separate yolk and white of egg, and beat yolk into butter and sugar. Stir in flour, mixing well. Add salt. Beat white of egg to stiff froth and fold into mixture. Put two tablespoonfuls of golden syrup into a buttered half-pint basin and pour in mixture. It should come to within an inch of the top of the basin, leaving room for it to rise. Put a piece of buttered paper over pudding and tie it on. Put into a steamer over saucepan of boiling water and steam for one hour. Turn out on to hot dish and serve. Some readers may know this pudding under other names, but I would suggest that when it is served locally in future it should be honoured with its local title. Incidentally, it would be interesting to know how the pudding came by its name of Rochester.



Photographs, Elaine Gardner.

Chatham News, 10/03/1939, page 9, Medway Archives Centre.

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Chairman's Letter

Elaine Gardner



Well, I am an optimist at heart, keen to get out and involved with activities and events once more and I am trusting that many of you will be too! At last, lockdown restrictions have started to ease and the FOMA Committee really appreciates how loyal our members have remained throughout this awful period, with almost all subscriptions for 2021 now renewed.

We have started organising events once more and have rescheduled two of our previously advertised talks for the remainder of the year. First there will be a talk by Christoph Bull on September 10 and then another by Jeremy Clarke on November 12; details can be found on page 40. Both will be at our usual venue of St Nicholas Church Hall, but we have decided to change the way we used to do things and have refreshments at the start rather than afterwards. As many of you know, both Christoph and Jeremy are entertaining and informative speakers, so we do hope to see you at their talks along with your friends. Following Jeremy's successful online talk that so many of you attended in April, we decided that we would also start organising some more talks via Zoom which will most likely be afternoon events. Many of our members live some distance from the Medway area and we understand the importance to reach out to them and also those of you who are less mobile. In addition, and in order to facilitate online booking, we have decided to use Eventbrite, the details of which will be circulated at a later date. We also plan to hold a quiz night at some point later in the year as these do raise considerable funds for supporting MAC. Again, we will be letting you know when a date is confirmed, but please do think about making up a team. If you have any ideas or thoughts about events please let us know (see page 46 for contact details).



In the past few months we have seen quite a few changes on the FOMA Committee and at MAC. At the AGM in June, Kevin Russell (pictured) decided to stand down from the committee, a decision which saddened us all, particularly as he has been a member of our team since 2010. Kevin has always been happy to volunteer, helping with a whole variety of events and activities organised by both FOMA and MAC, and has written a considerable number of interesting and well researched articles for *The Clock Tower*. He will be sadly missed.

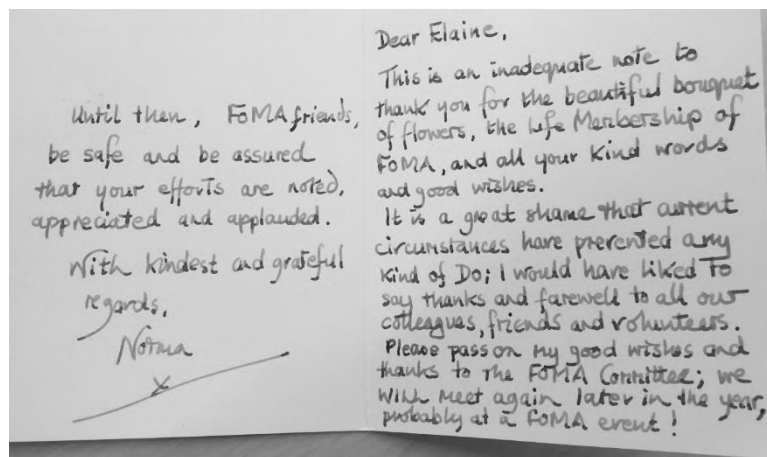
It does, of course, mean that we now have a vacancy on the committee and would welcome new volunteers. Please let me know if you would like to help!

Farewell To Norma Crowe

A few months ago Norma Crowe announced she would be retiring in the summer and it was a sad occasion on 7 July that we said goodbye to her, though happy with the thought that she can now relax and enjoy life in retirement. Norma has been the Librarian at the Medway Archives Centre for over 20 years and will be missed, I am sure, not just by all of us but also by those who regularly visit.

FOMA obviously wanted to say 'goodbye' and 'thank you' before she left, but alas, the delay with the ending of lockdown restrictions prevented the entire committee meeting at MAC so in the end Rob Flood, Jean Skilling, Len Feist and I represented the committee to say our thanks and wish Norma well in her retirement.

We met in the lobby, with an interesting exhibition organised by Chatham Traction as our background. Norma said she had arranged tea and coffee, and so armed with home-baked cake we met to present her with a bouquet of flowers and Honorary Life Membership of FOMA. Rob took some photographs - at Amanda's request - and then we all sat down to have a most pleasant chat about how Norma is planning to spend her retirement. The footpaths around her home in Hawkhurst are one target! Norma has promised to keep in touch, and we will no doubt see her at events in the future. We wish her the very best for a long and happy retirement.



A thank you card from Norma to all FOMA members.

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.

Editorial deadlines

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

The copy deadline for Issue 64 of *The Clock Tower* is Monday 25 October 2021, with publication on Wednesday 17 November 2021.

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

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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 Dr Alexander Thomas.

The Clock Tower is also available at 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

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; 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

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: becole40@gmail.com

Located alongside and on Sun Pier in Chatham - currently the only available public river access point in Medway - the festival will celebrate with historic vessels open to explore, free have-a-go stalls, history walks, and interactive activities to entertain and educate all ages

In the days leading up to the festival a free sail will take place on the *Edith May*, offering community groups and organisations who would never usually experience life on the river the chance to take the helm and have a go at steering the ship. Haul a sail, wind a winch, learn the history of the area and enjoy the peace of being on the river, all under sail on a 115-year wooden sailing barge (pre booking required). Seeing Medway from the river is without doubt its most beautiful viewpoint. These sailings will need to be booked in advance.

This event is organised by Medway Council in partnership with Sun Pier House and Tiller and Wheel. For more details go to <https://www.visitmedway.org/events/festival-of-chatham-reach-72978/>

FOMA Vice Chairman, Rob Flood will be running history walks through Chatham on both days of the festival, at 10.30am and 3pm each day. These walks will take in the history of music hall in Chatham, the great fires of Chatham and the development of Chatham from a small rural fishing village to the centre of a giant industrial dockyard. Please contact Rob for further details: rob@feetontheground.co.uk

As a footnote, we were heartened to hear from MAC's Archivist, Elspeth Millar that Medway Council has already agreed to advertise for a new librarian. We sincerely hope that the recruitment and appointment process will not take as long as for Elspeth!

A Donation from Henk

At the end of May, Amanda Thomas received an email from our friend Henk van der Linden in the Netherlands in which Henk was keen to find out how FOMA and his friends on the committee had been faring during lockdown. An Honorary FOMA Life Member, Henk also keeps up with our activities via *The Clock Tower*, but he was keen to have an update and to also fill us in on his latest news.

Readers will recall that Henk was awarded the British Empire Medal in 2017 in recognition of his extraordinary work (see *The Clock Tower*, Issue 46, May 2017) as Chairman of the Live Bait Squadron Society (<https://www.livebaitsqn-soc.info>). In 2004, killing time prior to a meeting, Henk wandered into a war graves cemetery in the Dutch capital, The Hague. It was here that his famous journey began which led him to uncover the story of Chatham's three cruisers HMS *Aboukir*, *Hogue* and *Cressy* which were torpedoed by the German U-boat *U9* during the First World War. Henk has always called this *Our Road to Chatham*, a journey which he had thought had ended on 21 September 2014 when we all gathered at Chatham Dockyard to commemorate the lives of the 1,459 men and boys – many from the Medway Towns - who died in the space of a few hours in the North Sea on the morning of 22 September 1914 (see *The Clock Tower*, Issue 36, November 2014). But that journey has continued and ever since, Henk has worked tirelessly to raise the profile of the Live Bait Squadron, and the descendants of those who perished.



*The memorial to some of the men of the
Live Bait Squadron,
Den Haag Municipal Cemetery, Holland.
Photograph, Amanda Thomas*

Henk's May email read as follows:

I am considering coming over to Chatham next September, to meet the new Dockyard CEO, and you of course!! Yesterday I read the latest *Clock Tower*, I am admiring all you volunteers to help your FOMA survive and keep on building it. I am aware of the present difficult financial times and would be glad to contribute myself a bit.

We were delighted just a few weeks later to receive a donation of £100 from Henk. At the July committee meeting it was agreed that this money should be used for something specific in the Archives and we have asked Archivist, Elspeth Millar to consider what she and the team would like to purchase. We are most grateful to Henk for his kind donation and hope that when he reads this issue of *The Clock Tower* he will be pleased to receive - once again - our most sincere thanks.



Henk van der Linden and his wife Toos on the occasion of the presentation of the British Empire Medal, 17 March 2017 in The Hague.

To conclude, I hope you can all enjoy the rest of the summer!

Medway Pride

Saturday 21st August, 12 noon to 8 pm,
Rochester Riverside Walk, Doust Way, off INTRA Old High Street, Rochester,
ME1 1FG.

Further information at medwaypride.co.uk



The first *in person* Medway Pride Festival is going to be a colourful fun-filled event, for all the family to celebrate diversity and support equality, and for all Medway communities. A community cohesion event, Medway Pride invites everyone to come together, break down barriers and develop an

understanding and acceptance of each other.

The event features community stalls from the voluntary community sector on their work, stalls providing memorabilia, sweets, hot and cold food (including vegan), and a bar for the over-18s. Entertainment commences at 12 noon with opening speeches from local dignitaries, and supporters, including the Medway Pride Radio Roadshow, ABBA Chique, Chai Latte, Gary Lucas, Elberace (Gay Elvis), River Medway, Amrick Channa, Dr Beverley Ballcrusher, Kelly Wilde, and Sami Brooks

In conjunction with the festival, Rob Flood will be taking two history walks on Thursday 19 and Friday 20 August at 7.30pm. These walks are called *Carry On Up The Khyber* and include details on *the oldest profession* and LGBTQ tales of the Medway Towns. Go to medwaypride.co.uk for booking links.

Festival of Chatham Reach

Saturday 18 to Sunday 19 September 2021

A country fayre atmosphere, with a focus on the heritage of the river and river vessels, the Festival of Chatham Reach will be remembering the history of Sun Pier as a hub of river life coinciding with the second weekend of Heritage Open Days.

FRIENDS OF CHATHAM TRACTION

During lockdown Chatham Traction has remained active, though work on the GKE bus has been postponed. 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.

Friends of Broomhill

We are pleased to confirm that we have now resumed our volunteer sessions at Broomhill Park and old orchard woodland area.



Thursday Old Orchard Workgroup - every Thursday 10am - 12pm:

Our Thursday morning workgroup concentrates on the maintenance of the Old Orchard woodland area. Every Thursday morning throughout the year, 10am to 12 Noon, meet in the car park at the end of King Arthur's Drive (ME2 3NB) at 10am - all welcome.

Sunday Task Days 2021/2022 - 10am to 12pm:

- 5 September 2021 - Litter Pick
- 3 October 2021 - Scrub clear
- 7 November 2021 - Bulb planting
- 5 December 2021 - Shrub/tree planting
- 6 February 2022 - Bob Wade Day
- 6 March 2022 - Wild flower planting
- 3 April 2022 - Litter pick

The task days are open to volunteers of all ages and abilities (children accompanied by responsible adult please). Tools are provided or bring your own. It's fun, healthy and free so get involved! If you would like to know more about volunteering with us, please contact us by telephone: David Park 07968-380588 or email us at: secretary@friendsofbroomhill.org.uk

For further details see our car park notice boards, or visit our website: 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

New Members

A warm welcome to new FOMA member Terri Zbyszewska.

In addition, we are delighted to announce that Andrew Brimson has become a FOMA Life Member.

The New FOMA Website

During lockdown, FOMA Webmaster, Dr Alex Thomas, has been working on a new look FOMA website. This will be launched on 1 September – look out for details!

Obituary

Steve Iles

It is with great sadness that we announce the death on 17 June 2021 of Steve Iles, husband of our former FOMA Treasurer, Josie Iles. Steve represented Strood North on Medway Council from 2015 and also served as Mayor and Deputy Mayor. Our sympathy and condolences to Josie and to family and friends.

Cynthia Powell

In July we were notified of the death of FOMA member, Cynthia Powell, on 3 June 2021. We send condolences and sympathy to her family and friends, and thank Cynthia's son for informing us.

Vice-Chairman's Ramblings

Rob Flood

Rob Flood shares his news and views on FOMA and the Medway heritage scene.

Photographed in 2020, Rob is wearing a protective visor produced by the American new wave band from Akron, Ohio called Devo. The mask is a play on the hats worn in the video for their hit, Whip It, from 1980.



The FOMA EBay Project

Not so much a rambling this issue than a moan. It is with regret that the FOMA Committee has taken the decision to close the FOMA eBay project. Both eBay and Paypal have changed the way they do business and although we are a charity, and therefore entitled to a special account and preferential eBay sellers rates, the level of detail we are required to give to eBay regarding the charitable status of FOMA is beyond the skill set of the committee. The project had already floundered on the back of Paypal issues and we've decided to call it a day. Chris de Coulon Berthoud and I will be working with MAC to more realistically price all books for future book sales.

The 1951 Rochester Pageant



An interesting request arrived in my email inbox shortly before going to press. It came from Nick Rampley (pictured), an ex-resident of Strood and an alumnus of the Math School in Rochester – coincidentally I was in the same year group there as his brother, Matthew.

Nick wrote:

I am a (mature) History MA student at Birkbeck College, University of London and my dissertation subject concerns the popular responses to the various events that were held as part of the Festival of Britain in 1951. I'm aware that Rochester was one of the places that held a pageant, held in the Castle Gardens on a Dickens theme. Although I am London-based I was brought up in Strood, so this seemed an obvious case study to use.

Opening Hours

Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm, Saturday 9am to 12.30pm, Wednesday and Sunday closed.

How to Make an Appointment

Email us at malsc@medway.gov.uk to make an appointment and to discuss which items you wish to consult.

For original archive material you must give at least 3 working days' notice of your intention to visit. For all other material (such as books, maps, photographs) we just require 1 working day's notice.

When you book we will ask for your name and contact details so that we can keep in touch with you about your appointment.

- Toilets are available but only for visitors to Medway Archives Centre
- Lockers are available
- There are no refreshment facilities currently available in the foyer

Exhibitions

Free exhibitions are displayed in the foyer to MAC for which no appointment is needed. Please note, you will not be able to enter MAC itself without a prior booking.

The current exhibition, *The Medway Heritage Bus: bringing the past alive* is available to view until 14 September; this has kindly been curated by Friends of Chatham Traction. Further details on the group can be found below.

CITY OF ROCHESTER SOCIETY WALKING TOURS

The Society's circular walking tours of Rochester centre recommenced on Wednesday 19 May and will continue until 31 October 2021. They take place each Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday afternoon, **starting at 2.15 pm from the Visitor Information Centre in Rochester High Street** and last about 90 minutes.

Why not go along and discover fresh information about Rochester's history and buildings from one of the Society's well informed volunteer guides? The talks are free but donations towards the various Rochester projects supported by the Society are very welcome.

All the walks are fully compliant with current Covid requirements.

News and Events

Calendar of Forthcoming Events and Exhibitions

FOMA Talks and Events

All events are subject to change and to government guidance for public gatherings. Further information will be available on the FOMA website (www.foma-lsc.org), our Facebook page (www.facebook.com/fomalsc) and sent to members via email, where appropriate.

Friday 10 September, 7.30 pm; doors open 7.00 pm.
The Griffin, Horse and Harp; The Earls of Darnley and their Irish connections.
A talk by Christoph Bull - Christoph is always an entertaining speaker.

Friday 12th November, 7.30 pm; doors open 7.00 pm.
Percy Fitzgerald - his collection (held at MAC) and his friendship with Charles Dickens
A talk by Jeremy Clarke.

Enquiries through the FOMA Chairman: Elaine Gardner, 102 Valley View Road, Rochester, ME1 3NX, Kent; emgardner@virginmedia.com; 01634 408595.

We are hoping to resume Quiz Nights in the autumn. Please see our Facebook page (www.facebook.com/fomalsc) and our website (www.foma-lsc.org) for all the very latest information on FOMA and Medway heritage.

Medway Archives Centre

32 Bryant Rd, Rochester ME2 3EP; 01634 332714.

Medway Archives Centre is open for pre-booked appointments only but opening hours have returned to normal. Our reopening is planned in a cautious way to ensure that we can review all of the practical issues involved in running the service safely. We will keep these opening arrangements under review.

About Appointments

We are operating an appointment-only system and all material must be pre-booked. We cannot accommodate visits without an appointment.

Nick has spent some time researching the Pageant at the Medway Archives, but he very much needs our help, as he explains:

My dissertation topic is about popular responses to the Festival – so I'm less interested in the details of what happened and more in what people thought and felt about it and how they experienced it: was it the 'tonic to the nation' it set out to be, or did it annoy people?!

So, I'm looking for whatever memories there may be, not just about the pageant itself but also about the fuss made about the Festival as a whole or of visiting the South Bank or Battersea. Or indeed, indirect memories: what did family and friends think about it and pass on to the next generation?

Can you help? If so, please contact our Editor, Amanda Thomas, at amanda@ajthomas.com and she will put you in touch with Nick – also coincidentally one of her oldest friends!

Medway Archives Centre News

Elspeth Millar



Hello *Clock Tower* readers!

The Medway Archives Centre (MAC) has returned to our normal opening hours, although for now we are still operating an appointment-only basis. Further details on our current service are available on our webpages (www.medway.gov.uk/archives) and all further service updates will be advertised through these webpages. Please contact us to make an appointment if you want to visit to use any collection material.

Events and Exhibitions

We have a wonderful new exhibition in the foyer area, which has been curated by the Friends of Chatham Traction. The exhibition, *The Medway Heritage Bus: bringing the past alive* will be available to view until 14 September 2021 – please note that you do not need an appointment to visit this, and it is available to view any time during our opening hours (see page 41).

Over August we will have two history trails available. The first one is around Strood town centre (about 1.5 miles) but you could also do this trail virtually using Google street view. This will involve some research either online or using the collections at MAC. There will also be a shorter trail in the area around MAC suitable for families and all answers can be found enroute for this trail. Pop into MAC to collect a trail map and clues, or email us for a digital copy.

Reminiscence Sessions

We held a couple of reminiscence sessions in June and July and, after a small summer break, plan to resume these with sessions in September and October. Please contact us if you would like to take part.

New Accessions and Collections

Collecting was reduced in 2020 and 2021, due to the pandemic, but we still received a steady stream of parish deposits, and some other recent accessions in the archives over the last few months has included:

- Additional records of the Boucher Family, Butchers, of 126/192 High Street Rochester (DE423);
- Horsted Farm documents. Documents originally given to The Friends of Horsted Valley by Barry Eldridge, son of the last tenant of Horsted Farm (DE1299);
- Records of Vicarage Road Adult Men's School, Gillingham (DE1301);
- Records of Court Lodge Farm, Cuxton, and Ifield Court Farm, Gravesend, which were run by a partnership Messrs. Moore & Miskin (DE1302).

We are still creating a community archive collection comprising material about, or created because of, the current Covid-19 pandemic, to ensure that the experiences of those that live or work in Medway is documented during this time. Submissions so far have included diaries, photographs and artwork. If you have any material you would like to donate, please contact us at malsc@medway.gov.uk and we can send you some further information.

Staffing

As you will have seen on the front cover and page 4, Norma Crowe, our Local Studies Librarian, retired in July after 26 years with the Centre, initially in post as Heritage Officer (for Kent County Council), and then as Local Studies Librarian (for Medway Council) from 1998. Norma has had a huge impact during her tenure as Local Studies Librarian, helping to build the collections here, and sharing them with the community through wonderful exhibitions, talks, events, reminiscence sessions and education packs. We wish her an exciting retirement!

After some research we found a photo on the internet stating 'Wounded Belgians at one of the British Cross Hospitals, Chislehurst, 1914'. It is clearly the same building as on the previous photo. But is it possible to verify which hospital [he was in]? Perhaps Hornbrook House?

After some more detective work we found a photo on the internet stating, 'Belgian wounded at Sittingbourne, Oct. 26, 1914'. We recognize our grandfather and some of his wounded fellow soldiers. According to the internet information the building is Trinity Hall.

We read newspaper articles, noting the men were transported via Calais to Folkestone, because [of] the terrible weather.

Is it possible that our grandfather first stayed briefly in Sittingbourne and then was transferred to Chislehurst? Would someone be able to find out more about his further trail? Are there lists of wounded Belgian soldiers in Folkestone, Sittingbourne, Chislehurst? Were they occasionally transferred to other hospitals? Alfred stayed in England until March 1915. He then was sent back to Flanders Fields. For a short while he was taken from the war front because of illness. On the 7th of March 1918, he got wounded by shrapnel. His arm was badly wounded, with a permanent disability for the rest of his life. He was operated on the hospital 'Beveren aan de Ijzer' (Belgium) and afterwards he was hospitalized in Bonsecours, Vernon and Port Villez (France).

June 1919 he returned home after 6 long years. He married, had 3 children, and passed away in 1935. He had cancer of the lungs, probably because of the use of war gas in the trenches. He was only 42 when he died ...

Hoping you will be able to help us in some way to find the missing information.

Kind regards,

Harry & Hilde Van Driessen – Meersschaert, Belgium.

Please contact the Editor, Amanda Thomas, amanda@ajthomas.com, if you have any information.

Between the photos of our grandfather is one 'Wounded Belgian soldiers leaving Red Cross Hospital to see the State Opening of Parliament November 11th 1914' (picture 1). Some more became clear to us. The picture - clearly not in very good condition any more - which he was surely very proud of, has clearly been in his wallet for years. In November 1914 he sent it to his parents in Belgium, telling them he was sitting in the first vehicle in the backseat. After a few mails send to England, more people told us the location: Chislehurst! The car is parked in front of Hornbrook House, a Red Cross Hospital. But was he hospitalized there or somewhere else in Chislehurst? We don't know ... We also have a second photo of our grandfather, somewhere in England, along with other soldiers, a nurse and another women. Our grandfather is the man on the far left; all soldiers are clearly already properly restored (pictures 2 and 3).



Picture 2



Picture 3

The FOMA AGM

Amanda Thomas



The FOMA AGM was held by Zoom on the afternoon of 11 June 2021. Attendance was not as large as it had been for previous Zoom meetings, but we were delighted to see so many members who live outside of the Medway area.

Highlights of the meeting included Elaine Gardner's thanks to Rob Flood and Christopher de Coulon Berthoud for the amount of money they had raised in book sales in the FOMA EBay Project - £275.72. Sadly, and as explained by Chris (see also Rob Flood's report on page 8), there have been logistical problems with the Project and the new PayPal system on EBay. At this stage Chris doubted the project would be able to continue.

We also discussed the best way to remember our dear friend and FOMA committee member Bob Ratcliffe who died in 2018. It had previously been discussed in FOMA committee meetings that a portrait of Bob should be commissioned to hang in the foyer at the Medway Archives Centre (MAC), given Bob's extraordinary commitment to Medway heritage in his lifetime. Rob Flood was able to show those present the painting which has now been completed by Marissa Mardon and which will be donated to MAC. FOMA Vice President Sue Haydock wanted it to be made known how delighted she was by the painting and the committee's idea for it to hang in the foyer. Permission will need to be granted by Medway Council in order for this to happen, however.

Elaine Gardner thanked Josie Iles for her service as FOMA Treasurer and Jean Skilling was formally adopted in that role. We were saddened that Kevin Russell had decided to step down from the committee, but the remainder of the committee was re-elected to their posts, and Sandra Fowler took the chair for that election to take place.

The retirement of Local Studies Librarian, Norma Crowe was also discussed, and Elaine relayed our intention to make a presentation to Norma of Honorary Life Membership before she was due to leave MAC in July.

Members can read more about what happened to mark Norma Crowe's retirement on page 4.

1941

Peter Cook



Peter Cook began his journalistic career with the Gravesend Reporter during the early 1960s. While working for the paper, he met his wife Lizzie, and the couple became Ten-Pound Poms emigrating to Australia. There he joined the Australian Broadcasting Commission at its outpost radio station in Townsville, Queensland. In 1970, following his return to the UK, Peter joined the staff of a brand-new BBC local radio station in Chatham, BBC Radio Medway. Peter later joined the BBC radio newsroom at Broadcasting House in London, helping provide national coverage for local radio stations. After more than a decade he and a BBC colleague formed Orchid Communications, generating audio communications services for large companies, but this was not to survive with the arrival of new technologies. Peter returned to his local reporting roots and joined the Kent Messenger Group, first at Gravesend and then at Medway. For about 15 years he recorded local history in the Medway Messenger's weekly 'Memories' feature. He describes the latter as 'the best job of my career.' Now retired, he and Lizzie live in Ospringe, Faversham.

Here, Peter recalls the terrible events of 80 years ago in Medway during World War Two.

There were no bells to herald the arrival of 1941. Had they been permitted it would have been to toll for victims of the Luftwaffe raids just two weeks before. Those raids were not yet over. January was not two weeks old when a house in Mount Road, Chatham was hit, killing Anna Perkins, 53, and 13-year-old Robert Cate.

But tragedies breed heroes, and Ronald Piper, 31, a joiner of Watts Street, Chatham, found himself at Buckingham Palace and standing before the King, who pinned the George Medal on his lapel. This was for the outstanding bravery he and Lance Corporal William Styles had shown in rescuing people trapped by debris following the Ordnance Street bombing, shortly before Christmas. The pair had tunneled into a 20ft pile of wreckage to release a Mr and Mrs Mattocks who with their son Oliver were trapped in the cellar of their home. They then went back in and hacked through a wall into the shop next door, where manager Mr Moir, shop assistant Miss Gouge and shop-boy Leonard Humphrey, were also trapped in a cellar. Piper and Styles spent over two hours in extreme danger, working with their bare hands, to fight their way through.

Alfred Van Driessen - Our Grandfather During WW1

24 March 2021,

Madam

About a month ago during the cleaning of our office, we found a shoebox filled with old photos among which - to our surprise - some of our grandfather Alfred Van Driessen, born in Kemseke, 22/12/1893. In 1913 he was in training with the '4th hunters on foot, register number 1771' in Charleroi (Belgium). When the First World War broke out, they fought in Luik, Antwerp and Flanders Fields.

Since a few years we've been trying to reconstruct his full trail as a soldier, but we missed one large link: his first injury in St.-Georges (Nieuwpoort, Belgium) on the 23rd of October 1914 and his hospitalization afterwards. Through the large chaos of the warfront we have found no data about him in Belgium. We only know that he returned to the front on March 26, 1915.



Picture 1

Life Membership

We were delighted on 25 May that FOMA member Andrew Brimson decided to *upgrade* to Life Membership and even more delighted to hear his reason why: 'I enjoyed my current membership and I am keen to learn more.' Thank you, Andrew and we will do our best!

Henry Lepper of Lydd

In the last issue of *The Clock Tower*, (Issue 62, May 2021), we published a letter from David Veall, dated 5 March 2021, asking for information on his great great grandfather, Henry Lepper, town sergeant in Lydd for 65 years, and pictured. Steve Cross decided that this was the project for him and so we put him in touch with David. Research, correspondence - and friendship - ensued, and, we were delighted to receive the following from David:

02 August 2021

Dear All,

I would like to thank you all for putting us in touch with Steve. What an amazing man to do so much work on our family tree as a volunteer. We could not have found some of this without his help.

Please all stay safe and well.

Best wishes,

David.



There was heroism too, on the high seas, where the master of a Royal Naval trawler tried in vain to save the life of legendary airwoman Amy Johnson. It cost him his life. An inquest at the Royal Naval Hospital, Gillingham, was told Lt. Cdr. Walter Edmond Fletcher of HM trawler *Haslemere*, watched from the bridge as Amy's parachute descended into the icy January waters of the Thames Estuary. Despite vicious cold he jumped in and could be seen to be supporting someone – possibly Amy. But he couldn't hold her and had to be rescued himself. He later died of exposure and is buried in Gillingham's Woodlands cemetery.

But there was good news too, much of it contained in cheerful letters from soldiers feared dead, but now reported very much alive in prisoner of war camps. Private A.V. Caulfield of Bush Road, Chatham, serving with the Royal West Kent regiment, sent a photograph of himself and his companions, and a letter which read, 'I hope you are keeping as well in health and as high in spirits as the chap second from right in the front row!' He had been captured at Dunkirk.

The Dig for Victory campaign was well supported in Gillingham, where the Council announced five new allotment sites, and urged people to take plots at 7s 6d a year – about 35p. Meanwhile the fear of sedition was strong, and an 18-year-old Rochester Corporation clerk, Laurence Tesler, of Wilson Avenue, was sentenced to a month's hard labour for 'spreading alarm and despondency.' He had written to the chief of police saying, 'This is to give you notice that from today onwards a most vigorous National Socialist campaign will take place in the Medway Towns to prepare the way for the Victorious German troops as they pass through.'

American support for Medway came from the citizens of Chatham, Massachusetts, who sent the Mayor of Chatham, Kent, £50, to be spent on civilian aid. It was, they said, 'a token of friendship and good will.'

In early March, a deafening explosion erupted on the River Medway at Cuxton, which caused the tug *Silverstone* to leap from the water before sinking, along with two of the four lighters she had been towing. Six watermen were killed. Earlier in the day a German parachute mine had landed in the river near Rochester Bridge but failed to explode. The tug picked up parachute cords with its propeller, causing the mine to explode.

The first big air raid of 1941 came in April when a parachute mine fell on Wickham Street and Amherst Road, Rochester, killing 11 people and injuring more than 100. Mrs Olive Nunn, then 18, later recalled:

'My mother, brother, sister and myself were in the house. We had not slept in the air raid shelter. The enemy aircraft had gone, and the guns had stopped firing. We were about to return to bed when we were plunged into darkness, surrounded by rubble and debris. The mine had hit a wall a few yards from the bottom of our garden. Most of the houses in Amherst Road and Wickham Street were destroyed.'

I groped for my 16-year-old sister's hand. She kept saying: "I can't see I can't see." She had lost the sight in one eye completely. The other was badly damaged. In Wickham Street huge flames were shooting up from the ruins of the houses. At the first aid post two children were swathed in bandages waiting for an ambulance. Both later died.'

Dorothy Chambers, who was 13 at the time of the bombing, recalled:

'I had a friend, Joan Keame, whose face was terribly injured from the bomb blast. I thought she would never come back from it. Some time later she said to me: "I will never get married. No-one will want me with a face like this." But my dad said to her: "It's not your face it's your heart that counts." Some time after that I met her again and she was very happy. "Guess what Dot," she said, "I've met an American and we're getting married. He wants to take me to America."

Among the dead that night were two members of the Auxiliary Fire Service, whose substation took a direct hit. They were Cyril Gibbons of Dorrit Way, Rochester, and Francis Chater of High Street, Chatham. A third fireman, Frederick Ryder, of Henry Street, Chatham, died after a bomb fell on the entrance to the Short's Seaplane Works. But there was a morale boost for Shorts' workers that summer when Gracie Fields – *Our Gracie* – came to perform in the canteen. Her car broke down on the journey to Rochester, but bosses extended the lunch break by half an hour. When she began her signature song, *Sally – Pride of Our Alley*, the cheering from the audience was so loud she had to stop. 'Don't muck about,' she said, 'now I've got to start all over again.'



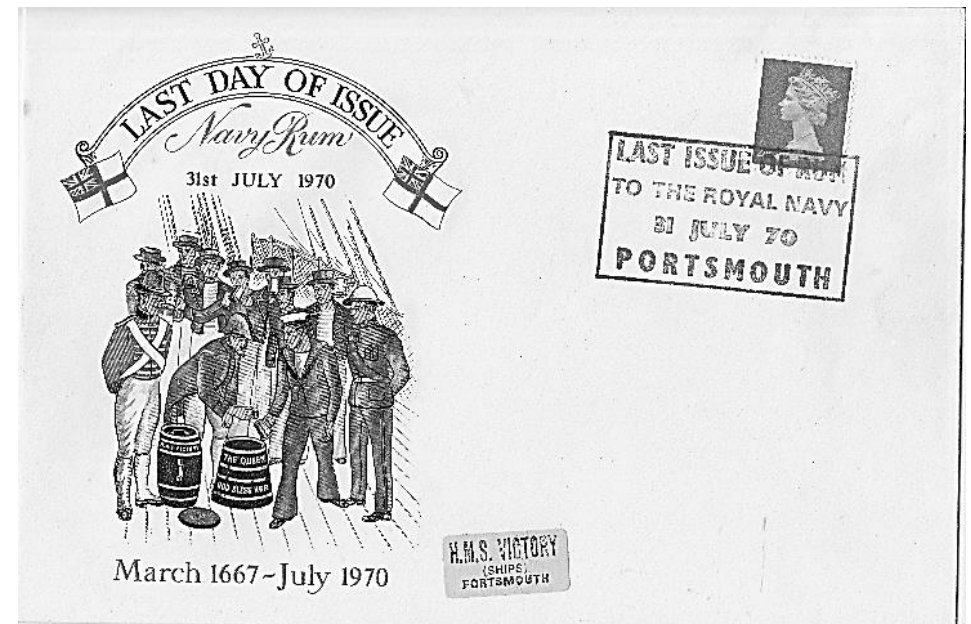
Wickham Street, after the bombing. Utter devastation; picture by courtesy of the Kent Messenger Group.

Readers' Letters

We welcome letters and emails from readers with their comments. If you have anything you would like to say please email the Editor, Amanda Thomas, Editor, at amanda@ajthomas.com, the FOMA Secretary, Chris de Coulon Berthoud at berthoud@blueyonder.co.uk, or visit the FOMA website, www.foma-lsc.org/index.htm or our Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/fomalsc>

Not the Decimalisation Anniversary

In the last issue of *The Clock Tower* (Issue 62, May 2021), Steve Cross, an 'ex-Royal Navy man', remarked that prior to decimalisation, '31 July 1970 was the day the Royal Navy stopped the tot – a great loss to us all!' FOMA member, Hazel Thorn, thought that *Clock Tower* readers might like to see the fabulous First Day Cover issued by the Royal Mail to commemorate that event, adding, 'It was only issued to those aged over 21 years.'



The Buck Family & Eastgate House

by FOMA member Pauline Weeds

Produced by the Friends of Eastgate House
£3.50, available from Eastgate House, Rochester.

Further information from Terri Zbyszewska,
The Membership Secretary,
Friends of Eastgate House,
31 The Esplanade, Rochester, ME1 1QW
or at tzbyszewska@yahoo.co.uk



ARP workers help residents rescuing some of their belongings in Wickham Street; picture courtesy of the Kent Messenger Group.

War never put a stop to crime, and in July an 18-year-old projectionist at the Palace Cinema, Dover, was sentenced to death for murdering his manager George Roberts, 50, of Second Avenue, Gillingham. He clubbed him to death with a firemen's axe before robbing the safe. Gillingham residents were always keen to hear about exploits of the prospective parliamentary Conservative candidate for the borough, Major Johnny Dodge, who had been captured and interned as a prisoner of war (POW). After several escape attempts, he was sent to Stalag Luft 2 where he helped plan The Great Escape, on which a Hollywood film was loosely based.

There was more tragedy on the Home Front when the decapitated body of a soldier was discovered on the railway line near Beeching's Way crossing. An inquest was told that Sapper John Briggs, 26, had recently suffered fits but did not seem depressed. The coroner recorded 'accidental death'.

In November came the sad news that Joan Louise Fieldgate, 27, of Oxford Road, Gillingham, had died in a German hospital. She had volunteered to escort children being evacuated to Australia, but on the return voyage her ship was attacked by a German raider. She and fellow passengers were kept in appalling conditions in various German ships before being imprisoned at Württemberg where she fell ill and died. Miss Fieldgate, a former student at Rochester Grammar School, had been offered three jobs in Australia, but turned them all down saying, 'I should feel such a cad staying, when things are so bad in England.'

Many Rochester and Strood children had been evacuated to a camp in Ashdown Forest for their safety. But danger found them in the form of munitions left behind by soldiers after an exercise. Evacuees, out collecting wartime souvenirs, came across an abandoned land mine which they brought back to the camp. While they were inspecting it, the detonator exploded, and Gordon Richard Medhurst, 12, of Darnley Road, Strood, was killed.



Evacuees from Rochester and Chatham at Wren's Warren in Ashdown Forrest, Sussex; picture courtesy of the Kent Messenger Group.

And so, 1941 drew to its tragic close. For many families it was a Christmas without children, evacuated to South Wales and other remote locations. And of course, the steady stream of local men lost on distant battlefields continued to occupy columns of the local newspapers. They could only hope that 1942 would bring better news, and perhaps the hope of victory.



Walter Prentis's specimens, originally on display in Rochester Museum at Eastgate House.

Notes and Acknowledgement

1. *The Zoologist*, No. 215, November 1894; (Google Books, accessed 29 April 2021).
2. Payne G., *Collectanea Cantiana*, Mitchell Hughes, 1893; (Medway Archives Centre 913.4223 PAY).
3. Payne, George, 'The wildfowl of our local rivers', *The Rochester Naturalist*, October 1907, p.485; (Medway Archives Centre).
4. <http://taxidermy4cash.com/exhibition.html>
5. *Dover Express*, 17 March 1893; (FMP).
6. Harris, E *Recollections of Rochester, No.12 Eastgate House*; (Medway Archives Centre).
7. *Kelly's Directory 1903*; (Medway Archives Centre).
8. Taylor, J C, *Eastgate House Museum*; (Medway Archives Centre C051166648).

With grateful thanks to Steve Nye, formerly of the Guildhall Museum, Rochester, for his help and encouragement in writing this article.

Most of Walter Prentis's ornithological specimens were stuffed by the skilled taxidermist Charles Gordon of the Dover Museum³. A friend of Walter Prentis, they explored the countryside together, gathering specimens. Charles Gordon was one of 14 taxidermists who exhibited a case of birds at the Great Exhibition in 1851⁴ and he had been connected to the museum at Dover for more than 57 years when he died of influenza in 1893.⁵

'A pair of Sea Eagles paid my district a visit in the month of November, 1879, one of them while sitting upon an oak tree over a furze bank frequented by rabbits, soon fell victim to a sportsman's gun, a fine large Eagle in mottle plumage and with a whitish tail...'

'The Tree-Pipit ... frequents trees in our low coppices ... When making hay near the woods the Tree-Pipit flies from heap to heap keeping the haymakers company, singing all the while its pleasing song.'

'February 7th, 1870, I had the pleasure of meeting with and shooting the Little Gull flying over a plough field bordering a marsh ...'

Walter Prentis died on 19 January 1901 at his home on Cozenton Farm, and was buried in St Peter's churchyard, Bredhurst. He had originally intended to bequeath his collection of birds to the Dover Museum, but was persuaded to leave them instead to Rochester Museum, then housed at Eastgate House.⁶ One large room housed his collection of birds and his library of natural history books.⁷ Later the collection was moved into two rooms in the Foord Annexe.⁸ Many local people will remember seeing the birds at the museum in Rochester, but today they are no longer on display.

Please contact the Medway Archives Centre if you would like to read *Birds of Rainham*.

The Peculiaris

Brian Joyce



Brian Joyce is the author of several books on the history of the Medway Towns, including The Chatham Scandal and Dumb Show and Noise. He is a past President of the Chatham Historical Society and was on the FOMA Committee. Brian was born in Chatham and continues to take a great interest in the history of the Towns. However, he now lives in Tyldesley in Greater Manchester. Since moving to the North West in 2014, he has contributed articles to many journals specialising in the history of his new local area.

Part One

One Sunday in November 1898, a *Chatham Observer* columnist writing under the name 'Betsy Trotwood', attended a religious service at a house in Nelson Road in Gillingham. The congregation numbered a mere fourteen people, including a baby. The worshippers were led by an Elder, who in Betsy's view was 'a fine, tall, hearty specimen of the English working man,' aged about sixty.

The service began with one of the sect's own hymns. To Betsy, this was sung 'in a very peculiar manner.' After singing the entire hymn, the tiny congregation stood up and repeated the first verse. They then repeated the verse's last line followed by the last half of the verse, 'so that we wondered when the verse was coming to an end.' This process went on through the entire hymn until the last verse, which was sung through twice.

Betsy found the experience overwhelming, writing that, 'The effect of the strong men's voices echoing round the small room was indescribable.' After this, prayers were said, and Betsy was shocked to hear God addressed as *you*.

This sect originated in the Rochford area of South-East Essex in the 1830s. Like similar groups, they were created by a former sinner, who found God, repented, was *born again* and became an itinerant preacher. His charisma attracted a band of devoted followers. An organised church was created, with prayer meetings at the beginning of every working day, Tuesday and Thursday evenings and three times on Sundays. Betsy Trotwood discovered that these arrangements still applied in Gillingham as late as the 1890s.

As the group's evangelism attracted more members and donors came forward, chapels were built, and a hierarchy formed of Bishops, Elders and Assistants (Helpers). Two preaching circuits were formed in Essex, and one in London, because the sect's influence had spread to Canning Town and Woolwich. Previously the group were called Banyardites after James Banyard, their founder, Newlights, Christian Brethren and so on. Once the group adopted a more formal structure, it was felt that a distinct name was required. They believed that Banyard had been specially chosen by God to create His true Church and that his followers were a group apart. They therefore used a term used in the Old and New Testaments to describe God's Chosen – The Peculiar People.

The Peculiar had several features in common with other evangelical groups: a belief in *rebirth*, the crucial importance of preaching, the literal interpretation of the Bible and so on. They adopted a puritanical lifestyle, rejecting the traditional drinking, smoking and gambling often associated with the labouring poor. They prided themselves as being hard-working men and women and had no paid preachers or clergy. The sect's men were unfashionably clean shaven, and Betsy Trotwood noted the distinctive dress of the women on her visit to Gillingham. She observed that they wore small bonnets like hospital nurses, 'with puffings at the sides and an old fashioned "curtain" behind.' Plain dress, in brown, grey and dove colour predominated.

What distinguished the Peculiar from similar sects was their rejection of medical treatment and their belief in divine healing, based on a literal interpretation of *James* 5: 14-15:

Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up.

When Betsy Trotwood remarked to the sect's Gillingham Elder that in this respect, the Peculiar People resembled the Christian Scientists, she received an angry response: 'They borrowed their ideas from us, they make a business out of it; it is all done for money,' and later on, 'WE do not come from America, nor do we visit a dying man and charge an eight-shilling fee.'

Betsy summarised his other observations: 'Therein is one great distinction between the Peculiar People and the Christian Scientists; the former consisting almost entirely of working men who scorn payment for religious work, while the audiences of the latter are composed chiefly of ladies dressed in the height of fashion, and whose leaders apparently thrive and wax fat on the proceeds of their spiritual assistance.' The divine healing issue was perhaps the most controversial subject in the tenets of the Peculiar People. Indeed, the sect split in 1855 when none other than its founder James Banyard called in doctors when prayers and anointing did not cure his son of a serious illness. Subsequently Banyard was removed from his Bishopric, and ironically, he died in 1863 when doctors could not cure him of a fatal illness.

'That extremely wet summer of 1860 is my excuse, or rather my pleasure, for making birds a study. Generally at home on my farm in the country my opportunities have not been slight for bird observation, at the same time being fond of my gun with a predilection for natural history...'

Walter Prentis, *Birds of Rainham*

In June 1860 Kentish farmers were watching the weather with apprehension. A prolonged period of wet weather, together with strong winds and unseasonably cold nights, were threatening the harvest. The *Kentish Gazette* reported that the wheat crops were tinged with yellow, and the price of corn was expected to rise. That summer a local farmer called Walter Prentis sat down in his farmhouse at Cozenton Farm to write a book entitled *Birds of Rainham*. The slim green book, a copy of which can be viewed at the Medway Archives Centre (MAC), was finally published in 1894.

The book at first glance appears to be a simple list of birds seen by Walter Prentis. Not much to offer anyone, perhaps, without an interest in ornithology. Look closer, though, and scattered throughout the book are details of farming life, industry, and the collection of his specimens – as illustrated in the box below. The names of birds have changed over time, with the gold-crested wren (now gold-crest), bramble-finch (now brambling) and yellow bunting or 'yellow-ammer' (now yellowhammer) all listed. And the book isn't merely an inventory of birds seen by Walter Prentis; it is in part a catalogue of his specimens, for most of the birds listed featured were in his collection of taxidermy.

Walter Prentis describes shooting birds, but smaller birds were perhaps netted, and others were collected having been killed in accidents. He includes an excerpt, written in *The Zoologist*, describing how a field of lucerne was mown at first around the edge of the field, and then in an ever-decreasing circle; a wild duck was seen transporting her eggs from a nest in the field to another site – luckily for her Walter Prentis didn't attempt to add her to his collection.

Walter Prentis was an occasional contributor to *The Zoologist*, but times were changing and when his little book of Rainham Birds was published, the review in the journal¹ was critical of his enthusiasm for killing the specimens, in particular his shooting of an osprey: 'How much better would it have been for the author to have used his influence to secure its protection ... If our rarer birds are to be preserved from eventual extermination, it might well be through the efforts of local ornithologists.'

Walter Prentis was in many ways a typical Victorian gentleman. Not only was he interested in ornithology, he also had a passion for archaeology, and discussed his findings with George Payne;² some of his archaeological finds were reported in *Archaeological Cantiana*, copies of which can be viewed at MAC.

My Memories of Rochester Museum and Eastgate House

Amanda Thomas



When I was a child living in Strood, Eastgate House was one of my favourite places to visit with my father on a Saturday afternoon. It was Rochester Museum then, and although I found all the exhibits fascinating, most intriguing was the attic full of stuffed animals and birds. I also remember the wooden panelling and the wonderful staircases - a narrow one to go up and a wide one to come down, at the base of which by the entrance to the garden, the curator once allowed me to strike one of the bells that used to stand there. Then there was the goldfish pond and Dickens' chalet in the garden. Each time I visited there was always something familiar to re-acquaint myself with; it is a place I still love and feel privileged to visit.

Adapted from The Clock Tower, Issue 2, June 2006.

In the following article, MAC's Helen Worthy reveals the extraordinary origins of one of Rochester Museum's most popular exhibits, the stuffed birds.

Walter Prentis

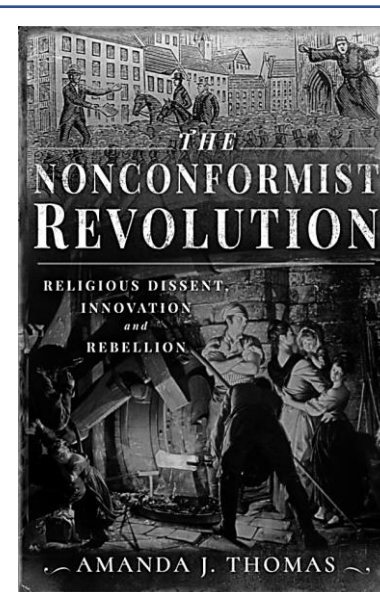
Helen Worthy



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

Probably the public outside the sect became aware of its existence during high profile manslaughter trials followed avidly by the popular press. In 1872, two children of George Hurry, a *Help* in Plumstead, Kent died of smallpox. Hurry had relied on prayer, holy oil and the laying on of hands to cure his sons. This did not save them, and he was tried for manslaughter on the grounds that while he as an adult could decide to refuse treatment for himself, his children could not. Meanwhile another of his children died. Hurry was eventually acquitted because it could not be proved that the children would have been saved even if medical treatment had been sought.

Part Two will be published in the next issue of The Clock Tower, in November, together with an article by Catharina Clement entitled, Nonconformity and the Medway Towns. If you would like to find out more about the history of Nonconformity, Amanda Thomas's latest book, The Nonconformist Revolution is available to purchase online and at all good bookshops.



The Nonconformist Revolution explains how the foundations for the Industrial Revolution were in place from the late Middle Ages when the early development of manufacturing processes and changes in the structure of rural communities began to provide opportunities for economic and social advancement.

Successive waves of Huguenot migrants and the influence of Northern European religious ideology also played an important role in this process. In addition, the Civil Wars provided a catalyst for the dissemination of new ideas and help shape the emergence of a new English Protestantism and divergent dissident sects.

The persecution which followed strengthened the Nonconformist cause, and for the early Quakers it intensified their unity and resilience, qualities which would prove to be invaluable for business. In the years following the Restoration, Nonconformist ideas fuelled enlightened thought creating an environment for enterprise but also a desire for more radical change. Reformers seized on the plight of a working poor alienated by innovation and frustrated by false promises. The vision which was at first the spark for innovation would ignite revolution.

Pen & Sword Books, £20; ISBN 978-1473875678.

What and Why?

‘Unless it had been for drink I should not have been here today.’

The Memorial on the Entry Gate at Chatham Town Hall Gardens.

Philip MacDougall



On leaving university during the early 1970s, Philip moved to the Isle of Grain, taking up a teaching post at Hoo, writing the first of his books, The Story of the Hoo Peninsula. Over time his interests broadened, taking a particular interest in the dockyard, and of course witnessing the effects of the closure, and the slow revival that followed. Among his recent books are a three-part Secret series, each book focussing little known aspects of the three towns. He has written several books on Chatham dockyard, a history of Short Brothers of Rochester and one focussing primarily on the one-time experimental air station on the Isle of Grain. His next book will look at the important alliance that once existed with Russia and which brought so many Russian seamen to Medway. While Philip no longer lives within the Medway area, his daughter and grandchildren live in Rochester

Public executions were one of the great crowd-pullers of the nineteenth century, thousands frequently present to witness such a macabre spectacle. Those in the Medway Towns who might crave for such an event had the inconvenience of making a journey to Maidstone, at one time to Penenden Heath, but since 1831 outside the main gate of the prison. Then, in 1834, discretion was given by the Home Secretary, to allow a public execution to be conducted on the Lines at Chatham. On 7 August 1834, despite dark clouds and heavy rain, an estimated 12,000 arrived to witness this joyless occasion.

The star of the show, the man to be hanged, was Private Benjamin Gardiner of the 50th Regiment of Foot while William Calcraft, a hangman since 1829, was his co-star. Known throughout the country, Calcraft was to become widely acknowledged for his many bungled hangings, these from his use of a short drop that frequently resulted in the condemned man or woman choking to death.

It was the Commandant of Chatham Infantry Barracks who had persuaded the Home Secretary to permit this particular execution to be moved to Chatham; Private Gardiner, on the parade ground of the infantry barracks, having shot dead, in front of his fellow soldiers, Sergeant Patrick Feeney.

Eighties Tech

Alison Archer



It is the late eighties; I was a teenager in my third year at Rochester Grammar School for Girls. Leg warmers, reversible sweatshirts and perms were all the rage and we all wanted to wear Grolsch bottle tops on our shoes because we idolised Bros. Kylie and Jason were still gracing Ramsay Street and *EastEnders* was a new TV phenomenon rather than the long serving institution it has become. I loved fashion, Bros, *Neighbours* and the residents of Walford Square, but what I loved more and still do, was history and particularly the history all around me in my home town of Rochester and the surrounding Medway Towns. The Norman castle and cathedral and Chatham Dockyard, previously one of the largest local employers, which had closed its gates in 1984 and was to re-establish itself as a heritage attraction, all held enormous fascination.

I remember wandering around the Guildhall Museum, entranced by the objects on display, losing myself in imagining the times from which they had come. However, in terms of Eighties' cutting edge, nothing could compare to the Dickens Centre, housed in the beautiful Eastgate House. Just gazing at the façade could transport you back several centuries - but step inside and wow, were you in for a surprise. At a time when most museums were still custodians of objects in glass cases, and interactive exhibits for children were yet to become the norm, the Dickens Centre (as it was then) transported you back in time to Victorian streets populated by the characters of Mr Dickens. The twisted, uneven corridors were full of holographic images, which at a time when today's digital technology was still unimaginable, held me spellbound. Moreover, the personality of the building fed an authentic ambiance. My personal favourite was Fagin in a hammock. I never failed to be startled as it lit up, showing his gnarled and twisted features, instantly terrifying and making me feel for his band of pickpockets, sweet little Oliver and even the more streetwise Artful Dodger. Blessed with a best friend, whose mum worked at the Dickens Centre, we regularly popped in for free on a Saturday morning before heading off to spend our pocket money in the Candy Shop or sit on the grass in the Castle Gardens talking about boys, bands and clothes!

Alison Archer is a Civil Servant with a lifelong passion for history and literature. She was born and grew up in the Medway Towns, moving to Plymouth in her twenties before returning to Medway. She has a BA degree from the Open University and has recently taken up writing as a hobby. Alison is the daughter of Pauline Weeds (see below).



Medway Archives Couchman Collection: Postcard photograph entitled 'Rochester, Eastgate Gardens'; DE402/5/38(L); 1920. Shows rear of Eastgate House, High Street, Rochester, and buildings to east of Eastgate House on north side of High Street. Published by Photocrom Co. Ltd., Royal Tunbridge Wells.

The Chalet and Water Wheel

Catharina Clement



I have memories as a primary school child from Troy Town (aged about 9) visiting Dickens' chalet in the gardens and being actually allowed inside it! We also had a demonstration of the water wheel next to the chalet.

So blatant was the act, that every soldier and marine quartered in Chatham, was required to attend the hanging, a warning to them as to what would befall anyone else who undertook such an act. Drawn up in regimental lines, their number can be added to the 12,000 who also assembled on the Lines.

The killing had taken place on the afternoon of 9 July. The men on parade had just been given the order by Sgt Feeney, 'left about face,' when Gardiner, throwing his musket from the shouldered position to the loading position, fired at point blank range. For Feeney, although death was not instantaneous, there was little hope that he would be saved: the musket ball hitting him about two inches above the navel before penetrating his liver and exiting between the eighth and ninth ribs. Ensuring that fatality would soon follow was the musket ball taking with it a button off Feeney's uniform, making the wound even worse than it might otherwise have been.

At the time it gave every appearance of being a deliberate act, and it may well have been. Following his arrest, Gardiner was heard to exclaim, 'I have rid the world of a rascal and tyrant!' On being taken to the Chatham lock-up, with Feeney yet to take a final gasp of air, Gardiner made one more claim, 'If he is not yet dead, I hope he soon will die, for I am not afraid of the rope.'

Later, however, Gardiner was to claim that it had been the act of a drunken man who had lost all control of his senses. He had come on parade in a drunken state, unable to hold his position in line, with Feeney ordering him to the guard house. It was this command that spurred Gardiner into taking the action for which he was to be hanged, for on sobering up, the killer admitted to being intoxicated and knowing not what he did or said. In admitting his guilt, he later added that he had no animosity toward the sergeant and deeply deplored the action he had taken.

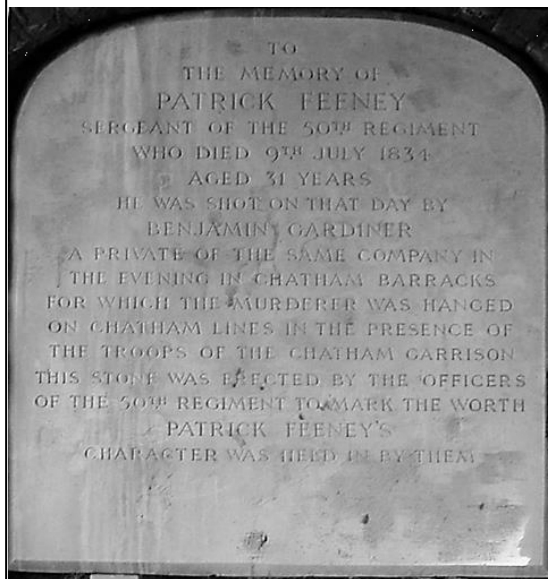
This, of course, would not save him from the gallows. Following a brief trial, during which Gardiner pleaded guilty, he was dispatched to Maidstone Prison until the day of his execution. On that day, he would enter Chatham by way of the Maidstone Road, much of the route lined by those who would, once he had passed, also make their way to the Lines. While the first part of the condemned man's journey had been by coach, when a mile away from Chatham he was placed in an open wagon accompanied by two armed prison wardens. Passing along Chatham High Street, Dock Road and finally into Brompton, he at no time showed any levity but did give to those he recognised a brief nod of recognition.

The scaffold that awaited him, and which had been erected overnight, was not the one used outside the prison, but one previously used on Penenden Heath and held in storage. As for Calcraft, he had been on the wagon with Gardiner and also armed with a pistol. This gave Gardiner the opportunity to make one small request, that he make it quick. Once on the Lines, and just before a mask was placed over Gardiner's head, some of the vast crowd might just have heard a few last words, a customary privilege given to the condemned. After confessing his guilt Gardiner added, 'unless it had been for drink I should not have been here today.'

At exactly 11:46am, the platform fell, and Gardiner was cast into oblivion, his last request granted, for the weight of the fetters that bound him, ensured his suffering was of short duration. Left to suspend for an hour, Gardiner's lifeless body was cut down before conveyance in a coffin back to Maidstone. Here, it was buried in an unmarked grave within the precincts of the prison.

Out of respect for Patrick Feeney, a memorial plaque was later erected (pictured) and which is still to be seen within the entry gate to Town Hall Gardens, previously the cemetery for St Mary's church. It reads:

TO
THE MEMORY OF
PATRICK FEENEY
SERGEANT OF THE 50TH
REGIMENT
WHO DIED 9TH JULY 1834
AGED 31 YEARS
HE WAS SHOT ON THAT DAY
BY
BENJAMIN GARDINER
A PRIVATE OF THE SAME
COMPANY IN
THE EVENING IN CHATHAM
BARRACKS
FOR WHICH THE MURDERER
WAS HANGED
ON CHATHAM LINES IN THE
PRESENCE OF
THE TROOPS OF THE
CHATHAM GARRISON
THIS STONE WAS ERECTED BY
THE OFFICERS
OF THE 50TH REGIMENT TO
MARK THE WORTH
PATRICK FEENEY'S
CHARACTER WAS HELD IN BY
THEM



Photograph by Betty Cole.

If we happened to be nearby shortly before the passing of the hour, mother or father would be dragged in to listen, albeit that we had done so dozens of times before! On one memorable occasion, the curator (Mr Taylor?) saw my interest and pulled the clock away from the wall so that I could 'watch the works'. It made my day!

Other items which took my interest included the robe worn by Dame Sybil Thorndike when she played the Spirit of Rochester in the 1931 pageant, and the imitation crown jewels, created at the expense of one of the national newspapers to celebrate the 1937 coronation.

If time allowed, I was also permitted to go up to the top floor (now out of bounds) to see the stone age encampment in one of the loft spaces. Much more recently, when the house was being cleared ready for its restoration, I retraced those steps to the attic and – low and behold – there were traces of the old camp still there. Memories came flooding back.

Lastly there was the gardens, designed by Sir Guy Dawber, to complement the museum annex built in the 1920s. They were lavishly planted and were a picture in spring and summer. The gardens also contained some interesting exhibits, including the remains of an old timber ship, and the water wheel (still there when I last looked) which had been rescued from the Lion Brewery in the High Street. Again, if Mr Taylor saw me looking at it he would turn a tap inside the house which fed water on to the wheel and made it turn.

The museum annex contained a large collection of stuffed birds, and butterflies pinned to display cards in glass cases which were covered to protect them from the light. Horrible stuff which would be deeply frowned on now, but which held a strange attraction for a ten-year-old. With today's restrictions and health and safety rules, it now seems amazing that we were allowed to wander at will throughout the house, with no surveillance or anyone forbidding us to touch anything. Happy days.

Alan is President of the City of Rochester Society. He was born, brought up and still lives within the old city boundary. The maternal side of his family has had roots in Rochester since at least the mid-nineteenth century. On his father's side they are newcomers - immigrants from Gillingham in 1919!

When I had viewed all the exhibits I went through a small door into the garden. This very small door was definitely the exit as once out you couldn't get back in that way. The garden had a lovely atmosphere, reminiscent of a Tudor garden with its large, lozenge shaped goldfish pond, a large water wheel, and a piece of old road complete with cart tracks worn into the stone. There was also a penny-farthing propped up against the wall.



By the pond in the garden at Eastgate House in the 1920s. Pictured, far left is Janet King's father, Ernest George Payne. The identity of the girls is unknown, but the adults are probably Janet's grandmother's sister and her husband.

My Memories of Eastgate House

Alan Moss

I have many happy memories of Eastgate House Museum from my childhood. Whenever I was in the High Street with one or other of my parents, a visit to the museum was a must if time allowed. A number of things in particular stand out.

I have always – and still do have – a passion for clocks and in the main entrance room there was a grandfather clock which played a merry tune on its bells each hour. I think the same clock is now in the main chamber of the Guildhall.



A Clock Tower Special

Eastgate House



From the Medway Archives Couchman Collection: Postcard photograph entitled 'Rochester Museum (Eastgate House)'; DE402/5/38(U); Sep 1920. View of east elevation and High Street elevation of Eastgate House Museum, High Street, Rochester. Also visible are Kent Education Committee noticeboards for adjacent Rochester, Chatham and Gillingham Technical Institute and School of Art and Crafts.

Eastgate House, pictured, is one of Rochester's landmarks. The building of the original red brick Tudor style house began in the 1590s, a home for the family of Sir Peter Buck, then Clerk of the Cheque - 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. Five generations of the Bucks lived at Eastgate House, and it was subsequently used as a girls' school, public library, museum, and then as a centre which celebrated the life and work of Charles Dickens.

Over the years we have published many articles in *The Clock Tower* about Eastgate House. In February 2013 (Issue 29), Elaine Gardner revealed the exciting news that Eastgate House had been successful in its bid for Heritage Lottery Funding. The project had been granted the full amount requested, £1.28 million towards the total £2.1 million cost for refurbishment. In May 2015 (Issue 38), Sue Haydock gave an update, and since then news has perhaps been more indirectly filtered through the *News and Events* page with the activities of the Friends of Eastgate House which was set up in 2011 to support the HLF bid and refurbishment.

Not since 2006, and in the second issue of *The Clock Tower*, have we put the spotlight on the special place this extraordinary building holds in people's hearts.

Memories of Eastgate House Museum

Janet King



A visit to Eastgate House in the fifties and sixties was very educational for it was, at that time, a museum. It was a *proper* museum with glass cabinets full of interesting objects from which you could learn a lot. The dark wooden panelling added to the whole atmosphere of the place.



Janet King with her brother, John by the pond at Eastgate House, circa 1959.

The first room on entering had a royal theme with a replica of the Queen's crown and a model of the state coach and horses. This display was probably in celebration of the relatively recent coronation. The crown had a purple cloth inset. The jewels were very bright, so I don't think they were real! Before you went up the stairs you could see the Chatham Chest (now in the Dockyard, which is more appropriate). This housed the Chatham Chest fund which was begun in 1588 to help disabled seamen. Sir John Hawkins was one of the original promoters of the charity, a large fund derived from the voluntary contributions from all seamen employed in the British navy by advancing a certain proportion of their pay. It had its headquarters at Chatham, and was an early form of national insurance, indeed probably the first in Europe.

Opposite the Chatham Chest was a carved effigy of The Parr's Head. This used to be outside a pub at 25 Parr's Lane and named after Thomas Parr, who died in 1635, supposedly aged 152!! Old Tom, as he was known at the time, became a bit of a celebrity due to his longevity. Thomas Howard, 14th Earl of Arundel, took him to London and 'put him on show' and several pubs around the country were soon named after him.

At Eastgate House, the small room across the way held an old fire appliance (now in the visitors' centre) and up the stairs near the top of the building were the stuffed birds. There were glass cases full of them. I used to carefully prod the cases, and they moved, quite realistically. I believe they were later moved into the top of the Adult Education Centre, where I presume they are still nesting. I think the birds interested me because of the variety and colour of the different species. We only seemed to have house sparrows where we lived, so I found it unbelievable that there were such exotic creatures in England.

One of the other rooms upstairs was full of old furniture, including, what I thought at the time, was a Tudor cradle. There was an irresistible urge to rock the cradle, to see if it worked, however I can't remember if I actually did.

There were several stairways back down to the ground floor, Eastgate being a rabbit warren of a place, and I knew them all at the time. One way down led you to a display devoted to archaeological finds which fascinated me; I think they were what inspired me to go on digs when I was a teenager.

Back on the ground floor, in what we called 'the new bit' there was a zoetrope which also intrigued me. It was situated on the wide sill by the window. I used to set it going, even though you weren't really supposed to touch it - or indeed any of the other exhibits - and watch the people, (or was it horses?) move. The zoetrope was pre-film and pre-television entertainment, a large drum with slits in with pictures drawn on the inside which appeared to move when you peered through the slits as it went round.