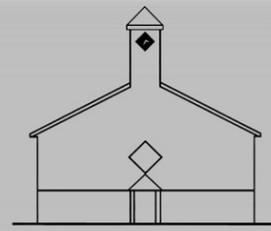


The Clock Tower



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

Issue Number 08: November 2007
Christmas Number



John Thomas Hawes, Mayor of Chatham, dressed as Father Christmas distributing Christmas gifts to children outside the National Theatre cinema, Chatham, circa 1938 to 1939.

John Thomas Hawes was a well known figure in Chatham and was mayor from late 1938 until the end of the Second World War in 1945. His granddaughter, FOMA member Jean Slater, remembers him well and has indexed his pictorial diaries, held at the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre, and from which this photograph is taken. The diary was dedicated 'To my granddaughter Jean'. Jean believes that the festive handing out of gifts was her grandfather's own idea, and the children in the photograph above had probably just attended the weekly Saturday morning matinee. Jean recalls the bags the children were given contained fruit, such as an apple, banana or orange, and sweets.

Jean's nickname for her grandfather was *Beve*, in the navy the name for someone with a beard. JT Hawes' beard also stood him in good stead as a Charles Dickens' double in the 1931 pageant at Rochester Castle, where he performed with Dame Sybil Thorndike.

More from Jean Slater inside...

From the Chairman

Tessa Towner, Chairman.



It hardly seems that three months have passed since our last newsletter. First, I would like to acknowledge publicly the work that our editor, Amanda Thomas, has put into yet another great issue and to say a big thank you to Amanda's son, Alexander, for all the hard work he has put in, setting up the system on *The Clock Tower* website to take passwords for all our members. Thank you, Alexander.

September saw The Friends of Medway Archives and Local Studies centre (FOMA) take part in the third Local and Family History Open Day together with some twenty other groups, who were there to show what their societies were all about. It was a very successful day and further details and photographs can be seen on the *News and Events* page and on the FOMA website, <http://pic7.piczo.com/FOMA>.

Sadly we have recently had to say goodbye to two of our committee members. David Carder, who helped put the constitution and rules together when we first started, has resigned. A big thank you, David, for all you did to help FOMA get off the ground. Dr Andrew Hann, Kent Team Leader for the Victoria County History's *England's Past for Everyone* programme, has now completed his two years attached to the University of Greenwich and is moving on to pastures new. Thank you Andrew: good luck in your new job, and congratulations to you and your fiancée on your coming nuptials.

On 31st October MALSC hosted a Volunteers' Day to thank those who have helped at the Archives in various ways; further details are included in the *News and Events* page. MALSC staff gave updates and details on current and new projects, and we were all able to participate in some of the proposed projects for the future in the day's practical workshops. A substantial buffet lunch was provided, enjoyed by all, as was the day.

A reminder to everyone that MALSC will be hosting the annual Mince Pie Day on Wednesday 12th December from 10 am to 12 noon - a seasonal social with book sale. All are welcome to come and join the staff in their annual Christmas special. In addition, in the afternoon there will be a talk by David Hubbard about the social and architectural history of the Foord Almshouses.

I would like to wish you all a very Happy Christmas and Prosperous New Year.

If you would like to join the Friends of Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre, please contact Lisa Birch, Membership Secretary, Medway Archives Office, Civic Centre, Strood, Rochester, Kent ME2 4AU. Telephone +44 (0)1634 332238; email lisa.birch@medway.gov.uk.

News and Events

Cindy O'Halloran, Friends' Secretary



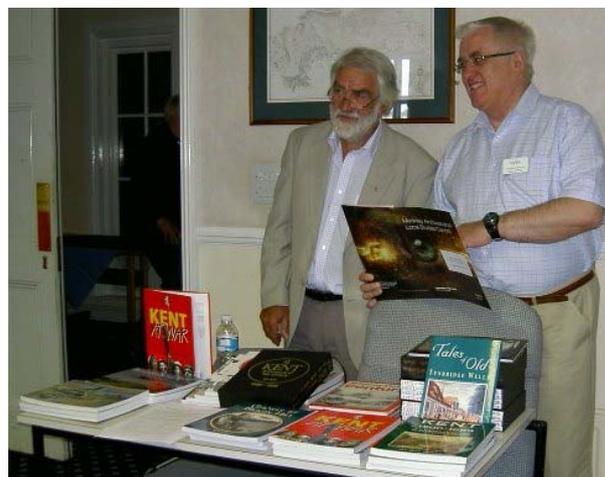
Local and Family History Day

On Saturday September 15th, FOMA and around 20 other groups took part in the third Local and Family History Open Day. This event, which celebrated the rich history of Medway and its surrounding areas, was organised by Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre. MALSC staff, local history authors and representatives from many local societies were on hand to offer guidance and advice on how to explore bygone times. Among those who took part were the Kent Family History Society, Kent Fire and Rescue Museum, the Royal Engineers Museum, the Centre for Kentish Studies, Chatham Dockyard Historical Society, the Association of Men of Kent & Kentish Men, Lower Medway Archaeological Research Group, the Orders & Medals Research Group, the Short Brothers Commemoration Society, Drill Hall Library Universities @ Medway, Friends of Chatham Traction, the Victoria County History's *England's Past for Everyone* project, and the historical societies of Chatham, Rochester, Gillingham, Halling, Higham, Rainham, Snodland, and Strood. Well-known local historian, Bob Ogley, who has written many popular books on Kent, was special guest for the day and gave two talks: Kent in 19th century and Kent in the 20th century. The day was extremely successful.



Bob Ratcliffe, President of the City of Rochester Society, pictured (standing, far right) with copies of the Society's newly published book entitled, A Man of Many Parts - Edwin Harris of Rochester, by Mrs Pat Salter. Pictured in the background (in red) is Kate Woollacott, formerly Manager of MALSC and latterly Area Librarian, until her recent retirement. At the Local and Family History Open Day Kate was representing the Higham Village History Group.

From left to right: Bob Ogley, author, and Councillor Howard Doe, Portfolio Holder for Community Services, Medway Council, the directorate for libraries, including MALSC.



Volunteers' Day

On Wednesday 31st October a Volunteers' Day was held at MALSC, arranged by April Lambourne, Archive and Local Studies Officer, and following the recent appeal to users of the Study Centre to sign up as volunteer helpers for some proposed project tasks. MALSC currently has several groups working in a volunteer capacity. The Kent Family History Society has helped with newcomers to Family History. Betty Cole has been helping with oral reminiscence transcriptions, Doris Herlihy has been helping with ephemera files, and the City of Rochester Society has been working with Janet Knight to put together a detailed history of Rochester High Street. Further details on this are included in Norma Crowe's article below, *Watts' Alms Houses Reminiscences*.

It was decided to ask the new volunteers to help with the identification of Local Studies photographs and list slides from the Ian Fraser collection held by the Archives. These mostly comprise street scenes of the Medway area prior to building or traffic management works. Groups were formed for the various projects to be tackled and we were soon busy pouring over photographs and slides. The local knowledge of the volunteers came to good use and many of the locations were identified very swiftly. The slide collection gathered a good crowd and we enjoyed a trip along memory lane marvelling at the changes that have taken place over the past 30 years alone. Defunct models of cars were identified, fashions laughed at and bus enthusiasts enthralled! At lunchtime a buffet was provided as a thank you all who came for the day and for those who are long serving helpers. The groups will shortly commence meeting on a regular basis to work their way through the various collections.

If you are interested in helping with any of the projects and others that are in the pipeline, please contact April Lambourne at april.lambourne@medway.gov.uk or Tel: 01634 332097.



Some images from the day



Calendar of Forthcoming Events and Exhibitions

19th November to 29th January 2008

Exhibition: Thomas Hellyar Foord
by Bob Ratcliffe.

7th December, 7.30 pm

FOMA Christmas Wine and Wisdom (quiz night and raffle)

The Presentation Suite, Civic Centre Strood, commencing at 7.00 pm.

Tickets are £4.00 FOMA members and £5.00 for non members.

Teams of six per table, however, if you do not have a full team or wish to attend on your own, there will be tables needing extra team members. Food will be provided, but please bring your own drinks. There will be a raffle and a prize for the winning team and a booby prize for the losers. Numbers by Tuesday 4th December 2007 at the latest, please.

If you are able to help with arrangements on the day or wish to donate a prize for the raffle, please contact Cindy O'Halloran as soon as possible (see contact details below).

12th December 10.00 am to 12 noon

Mince Pie Day.

All welcome to partake of tea, coffee and mince pies along with a sale of books. To be followed at 2.30pm with a talk by David Hubbard – The social and architectural history of the Foord Almshouses. Reduced admission for FOMA members.

31st January to 29th March 2008

Exhibition: Rochester Cathedral: a selection of pictures from the Cathedral's photographic archive.
An exhibition by Pat Salter.

As part of our ongoing series of FOMA events, please make a note in your diaries of the following for 2008.

Tuesday 29th April 2008 7.30 pm

A talk on barges by Tony Farnham.

We also have several proposed visits and outings planned for 2008, the dates for which are yet to be confirmed, including a visit to Starkey Castle and a tour of Rochester Cathedral (possibly to include some areas not usually open to the public). We are also hoping to arrange another trip on the Kingswear Castle. If there is enough interest, we are proposing a trip to follow the Thames Barge Match and watch the race as it takes place. More details in future issues of *The Clock Tower* and as dates are confirmed.

Unless otherwise indicated, all the above are held at the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre, Civic Centre, Strood, Rochester, Kent ME2 4AU. Further information is available from Cindy O'Halloran, Friends' Secretary, at cindy.ohalloran@medway.gov.uk or on +44 (0)1634 332238/332714.

FOMA Members

One of the best aspects of being Secretary for the Friends is receiving interesting news about the activities of FOMA members.

Jean Slater

The front cover of this Christmas issue of *The Clock Tower* features John Thomas Hawes, Mayor of Chatham, the grandfather of FOMA member Jean Slater. The next issue of *The Clock Tower* will feature the first of a series of articles containing extracts and photographs from JT Hawes' pictorial diaries held at the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre.



Jean Slater

Jean writes, "Born in Chatham in 1932, I was fortunate in being old enough to share some of the thrills and pageantry that came with my grandfather's role as Mayor from 1938 to 1945. His legacy to me of a large scrapbook of photographs and cuttings covering his, and Chatham's journey through the war, is priceless. These papers stimulate memories that I hope will prove of interest. Now living in Felpham, West Sussex, I keep my ties with Chatham through family and the Old Girls' Association of the Chatham Grammar School. Sights, sounds and scenes - such as the smell of Stockholm Tar on the Sun Pier - the eerie feeling the night Jerry lit up Chatham with flares - the shuddering crash when Big Bertha, the naval gun, opened up. This was the Chatham I knew, and love."

As a prelude to her forthcoming series in the next issue of *The Clock Tower*, Jean has kindly provided a poem which won third prize in the 100 word story section of the annual literary competition run by Age Concern, West Sussex.

1983 - a glorious July day. I sit by the sparkling Solent clutching an ashtray.
A war-stained submarine berths – straight from the Falklands conflict.

December 1940 – freezing, now I witness a different birth. H.M.S. Umpire slips majestically into the Medway from No. 7 Slip, Chatham Dockyard.

July 1941. Nighttime, two convoys, one sailing north, the other south. Minimal radar, engine trouble, calm sea, contact lost with destroyer escort – COLLISION – Umpire sinks into the North Sea. 9 survivors, 22 lie in icy depths.

July again. I proudly hand the ashtray (token given when my Grandmother launched Umpire) to Submarine Museum, Gosport.

Pat Salter

Alan Moss, City of Rochester Society Journal Editor and Membership Secretary, sent us the following information about Pat Salter's latest book, and is a reminder for those who may have missed this piece of news in the last issue of *The Clock Tower*.

A Man of Many Parts - Edwin Harris of Rochester, by Pat Salter, published by the City of Rochester Society.

Anyone who has the slightest interest in Rochester and its surroundings needs to know about Edwin Harris. He was one of the City's *characters* and without him our knowledge of Rochester and its history would be much the poorer. My own meagre efforts as a contributor to books, pamphlets and articles about the City have been enriched by dipping into Harris's own writings. To those of us who act as City Guides, Harris must also be an inspiration, as he was the first official guide and acted in that capacity for many years. During Rochester's Civic Week in 1931 he conducted tours of the City each day at 10.30am, 11.45am and 6.00pm: no mean feat for a man in his 73rd year.

Harris was a prolific writer, both in fact and fiction, however, any history student - and the seeker after truth - must always bear in mind that in his writings the two sometimes become intertwined. So long as that is remembered, his books, pamphlets and articles are a joy to read. But it is as an observer and recorder of contemporary events that he is at his strongest, and for that alone we must be grateful.

Edwin Harris is most often remembered for his writings, but he was indeed a man of many parts: a business man, running the thriving family printing business from The Old Curiosity Shop in Eastgate, a respected antiquarian, an authority on Charles Dickens and founder member of the Rochester branch of the Dickens Fellowship, a special constable, druid and devoted family man. He was also truly a man of Rochester, living almost all of his 79 years in the City. Harris's life needed to be properly documented and in this volume Pat Salter has done it full justice. Pat has invested an immense amount of time and effort in her research and should be very proud of the finished product. Moreover, The City of Rochester Society is proud to be associated with this work and commends it most warmly to all who share with us a love of our City of Rochester.

A Man of Many Parts - Edwin Harris of Rochester by Pat Salter is available, price £8.95, from the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre, and other local outlets. It can also be purchased direct from the publishers (<http://www.city-of-rochester.org.uk>), the City of Rochester Society, 32 Powlett Road, Frindsbury, Rochester, Kent, ME2 4RD, adding £2.00 for postage and packing. Cheques should be made payable to *The City of Rochester Society*.

Later in this issue of The Clock Tower we publish the first of a new series by Janet Knight of the Local Studies Centre examining the contribution Edwin Harris made to the history of Rochester and why he is so fondly remembered at MALSC.

About The Clock Tower

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

Editorial deadlines

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

The copy deadline for Issue 09 of *The Clock Tower* is Monday 4th February 2008.

Publication date

The third Wednesday following the editorial deadline.

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Front Cover Accreditations and Website Information

The logo for *The Clock Tower* was designed by Bob Ratcliffe.

The banner design (incorporating the logo) and the title *The Clock Tower* were designed by Alexander Thomas.

The Clock Tower is also available on: <http://ajthomas.com/theclocktower>

Further Information

Further information on the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre can be obtained on the MALSC CityArk website <http://cityark.medway.gov.uk/> or by writing to Medway Archives Office, Civic Centre, Strood, Rochester, Kent ME2 4AU. Telephone +44 (0)1634 332714; fax +44 (0)1634 297060; email: malsc@medway.gov.uk

General enquiries about the Friends can be obtained from the Secretary, Cindy O'Halloran, at the above address, or by telephoning +44 (0)1634 332238/332714. Membership enquiries should be directed to the Membership Secretary, Lisa Birch: lisa.birch@medway.gov.uk; +44 (0)1634 332238

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Archives Update

Stephen Dixon, Borough Archivist



British Library Hidden Treasures Brought to Life Competition

I am delighted to announce that the *Textus Roffensis*, held at the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre as part of the Rochester Cathedral archives, has won first place in a competition organised by the British Library for local treasures to be scanned and published on their web site as part of *Turning the Pages 2*, a Microsoft technology that enables users to ‘virtually’ turn pages on a computer screen.

Compiled by a single Benedictine monk at Rochester, 1123-1124, the *Textus Roffensis* drew on Anglo-Saxon or Old English documentary sources that no longer survive. It contains the earliest recorded English laws, the earliest written record of the English language and the Coronation Charter or *Institutiones* of King Henry I of 1100, used by the barons as a model for *Magna Carta*. Thus the *Textus* is the earliest document to which we can trace the origins of English style legal systems and constitutions around the world, including the Commonwealth countries, the United States and countries whose constitutions have been written by the United States, such as Japan, Austria and Iraq. It also contains a list of Kent parishes predating the Domesday Book, the foundation charter of Rochester Cathedral and one of the earliest uses of Arabic numbering in the Christian west.

The *Textus Roffensis* is already fully digitally reproduced on *CityArk* but the hosting of new *Turning the Pages* images on the British Library web site for three years will bring the book to a wider audience.

Councillor Howard Doe, portfolio holder for Community Services for Medway Council, said, “This is wonderful news and everyone from Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre and Rochester Cathedral should feel incredibly proud of this accolade. This is a great opportunity to bring this historically important document to life with new technology and share it with a wider audience, as well as putting Medway on the map.”

A trophy and certificate were presented to Canon Peter Lock, Archdeacon of Rochester, and April Lambourne, Archives and Local Studies Officer at Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre, at a prestigious awards ceremony at the British Library on 4th September, attended by Margaret Hodge, Minister of State for Culture, Media and Sport.

It is hoped to add the *Textus Roffensis* pages to *Turning the Pages 2* later this year and an exhibition of the original book may be taking place locally during 2008.

To see *Turning the Pages* visit the British Library web site

<http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/ttp/ttpbooks.html>

Medway Council press release [click here](#)

<http://www.medway.gov.uk/news/newsmain/newspage?item=67026>

British Library press release [click here](http://www.bl.uk/news/2007/pressrelease20070905.html) [<http://www.bl.uk/news/2007/pressrelease20070905.html>](http://www.bl.uk/news/2007/pressrelease20070905.html)

Current *Turning the Pages* treasures [click here](http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/ttp/ttpbooks.html) [<http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/ttp/ttpbooks.html>](http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/ttp/ttpbooks.html)

BBC TV News feature [click here](#)

http://news.bbc.co.uk/player/nol/newsid_6970000/newsid_6978900/6978921.stm?bw=bb&mp=rm&news=1 (movie file, RealPlayer required)

BBC web site report [click here](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/6979651.stm) <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/6979651.stm>>
BBC Radio 4 news feature (web page) [click here](http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/today/galleries/2380/5/)
<<http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/today/galleries/2380/5/>>
BBC Radio 4 news feature (audio file) [click here](http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/today/listenagain/ram/today4_20070905.ram)
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/today/listenagain/ram/today4_20070905.ram>
24 Hour Museum report [click here](http://www.24hourmuseum.org.uk/nwh_gfx_en/ART50297.html)
<http://www.24hourmuseum.org.uk/nwh_gfx_en/ART50297.html>

Accessions

Accessions of interest since the last newsletter include additional records of Gordon Road Junior School, Strood, comprising the quarterly attendance summary book 1949 - 1952, with loose summary sheets 1952 - 1965 (1 volume), admission registers [girls' department] 1958 - 1964; [boys' department] 1946-1957; [mixed school] 1964 - 2001 (8 volumes); [boys' dept] punishment book 1950 (1 volume); log Book 1985 - 1995 (1 volume); Memorial Bible in remembrance of G. E. Southcott, Headmaster 1949 - 1966, whole school photographs 1998 and photographs pertaining to the retirement of H. Bardoe, Caretaker, 2005. The deposit also contained the remains of a late 19th century girl's boot found during school building work, presumably buried to ward off evil spirits (DE1152; C/ES 150/B/5).

We have received the principal deposit of records of High Halstow Parish Council, mainly comprising correspondence, 1961-1994. These include some financial papers and minutes of the Recreation Hall management committee and High Halstow Lawn Tennis Club which are perhaps the only records surviving for those organisations for the 1950s and 1960s and except for being included by accident with the parish council records would not have found their way to us. It is pleasing that records of these social activities or organisations should have survived, to throw yet more light on the wide expanse of the Hoo Peninsula which is generally less well recorded than the Medway Towns (DE1154; P167/PC).

Records of the Gillingham Recorded Music Society, formerly Gillingham Gramophone Society, comprising minute books 1947-2007, income and expenditure book 1948-2007, outings account books 1966-1984, rules and constitution, secretary's correspondence, index cards to speakers 1994-2007, programmes 1951-2007, notebooks, bulletins and red tablecloth embroidered GRMS 1947-2007 (DE1156).

Scrapbook compiled by Charles G. Miller, 17 Rochester Avenue, Rochester, son of Rev. G. Anderson Miller and inscribed by him 21st August 1916 with additions by some later compilers, containing newspaper cuttings, photographs, letters, postcards, printed leaflets, posters, ephemera and facsimile and original architectural drawings relating to Miller's family, their church, Rochester Baptist Church, Maidstone Road (later Crow Lane), Rochester, local nonconformist Sunday schools, Kent and Sussex Baptist Association, together with photographs of members of Medway Swimming Club [see also Couchman Collection DE402] labelled Miller of Rochester 1888-1979 (DE1157).

CityArk

I hope regular users of our ImageBase and in particular *Medway Ancestors* will by now have noticed the new navigation tools added to the images pages. I hope you will agree this new tool makes moving through the sequences of images much easier and quicker. I am grateful to *Medway*

Ancestors' users for emphasising the need for this enhancement in our online questionnaire a couple of years' ago.

Also added recently are the images of the minute books and application records of Hawkins' Hospital, Chatham (CH108) forming the first stage in our Sea Salts project for publishing scans of our abundant and important maritime collections. Hawkins' Hospital was founded by the Elizabethan naval hero Sir John Hawkins in the aftermath of the Spanish Armada. By coincidence, the publication of the images coincides with the release of the film *Elizabeth: The Golden Age*, in which the defeat of the armada features prominently. We can take pride in the close connection between the Medway Towns and in particular Chatham, which first grew to prominence as a dockyard in Elizabeth's reign, and the great personalities and events of that epoch. Richard Watts, who founded the famous Rochester charity and whose records we also hold, served as the clerk of works charged with building Upnor Castle. Watts lived on Boley Hill, Rochester, where his house became known as Satis House following his entertaining of the queen there and on his being given the reply *satis* (enough) on asking if the fare had been adequate. The Watts' almshouses are still in use today and Local Studies Librarian Norma Crowe has been talking to residents about their memories of Rochester High Street (see *Watts' Alms Houses Reminiscences* below).

To view the Hawkins' Hospital images, click here:

http://cityark.medway.gov.uk/query/results/?Mode=Search&SearchMode=explorer&SearchWords=01_4_Images_Shortcuts&DateList=&.submit=Submit+Query&Boolean=AND&Results=25&PathList=&.cgifields=Verbose&.cgifields=Exact

I am delighted to report we have added several new films to the MovieBase. These include footage of the Rochester Historical Pageant of 1931, a related film entitled Historical Rochester of about the same date and a colour film with soundtrack recording several decades of boating up the River Medway from Rochester to Tonbridge. The Rochester Historical Pageant of 1931 includes footage of JT Hawes, Mayor of Chatham, (see the front and back pages), who performed as Charles Dickens.

To view the MovieBase, please click here:

http://cityark.medway.gov.uk/query/results/?Mode=Search&SearchMode=explorer&SearchWords=Z4c_Intro2_Referral&DateList=&.submit=Submit+Query&Boolean=AND&Results=25&PathList=%2FZ4c_Medway_MovieBase%2F&.cgifields=Verbose&.cgifields=Exact

Volunteer Activities

On 31st October, and as has been well documented by the Friends' Chairman, Tessa Towner, and by Friends' Secretary Cindy O'Halloran on the *News and Events* page, we held a special training day for all of our prospective volunteers. It was hailed a great success. Volunteers have been enrolled for the listing of the Ian Fraser slide collection, *Archives of Great Expectations* (our project to list the Rochester City Archives), recording of Rochester High Street and identifying unknown photographs. I am also glad to report we received expressions of interest from several volunteers to assist with our annual programme of inspecting parish records at churches throughout north-west Kent. Until the 1990s volunteers routinely assisted with this work but for about ten years the burden has fallen on staff. The next round of parish records inspections begins in Spring 2008.

The day began with a touching tribute to the work of one of the Kent Family History Society searchroom volunteers, John Witheridge, who has been coaching a novice researcher with a background of learning difficulties. Few in the audience can have been unaffected by John's account of this painstaking mentoring work. John is also a dedicated member of the FOMA committee and Vice Chairman. For our readers' information, several KFHS volunteers assist

searchroom duty staff by coaching novice family historians and genealogists each Tuesday and Thursday morning, on a first come, first served basis. All at MALSC are immensely appreciative of this contribution.

Season's greetings to all our readers.

Online database and imagebase <http://cityark.medway.gov.uk>

Online leaflet <http://www.medway.gov.uk/archive.pdf> (Adobe Acrobat Reader required)

Educational use of Medway Archives <http://www.medway.gov.uk/index/leisure/archives/6834.html>

Useful links: http://cityark.medway.gov.uk/cgi-bin/interface.cgi?Mode=Search&PathList=%2FZ2_USEFUL_LINKS%2F%0A&SearchWords=&DateList=

List of record agents: http://cityark.medway.gov.uk/cgi-bin/interface.cgi?Mode=Search&PathList=%2FZ5_Record_agents%2F%0A&SearchWords=&DateList=&Boolean=AND&Results=50

How to find us: <http://cityark.medway.gov.uk/about/contact/>

Edwin Harris – Recollections of Rochester

Janet Knight, Local Studies, MALSC

Janet Knight has worked at Medway Archives and Local Studies for over 16 years. She started work as assistant to Pat Salter and later transferred to Local Studies, working with Norma Crowe. Pat Salter's interest in Edwin Harris fired Janet's own enthusiasm and she has become another eager member of the Edwin fan club. Janet is often heard to say, "I wonder what Edwin has to say on the matter..."

In the first of a new series, Janet Knight, examines the contribution Edwin Harris made to the history of Rochester and explains why he is so fondly remembered at MALSC.

Edwin Harris submitted articles to the *Rochester, Chatham and Gillingham Observer* on a regular basis during the period 1932-1933. He called these articles *Recollections of Rochester* and they are now held at The Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre. In her new book, *A Man of Many Parts – Edwin Harris of Rochester 1859 – 1938*, local author and historian Pat Salter writes:

“Edwin Harris was a writer of both fact and fiction and unfortunately often combined the two.”

The articles written for *The Observer* were an eclectic mix of fact, some fiction, anecdotes of his own life, and observations of local characters. They are a fascinating glimpse into old Rochester peppered with little notes that could not be found anywhere else. Unfortunately Harris seldom gives sources for his stories, and it is therefore difficult to prove whether some of his articles are actually based on truth. They are however very informative and amusing. As it has been many years since the articles were printed we thought that it might be of interest to reproduce some of the articles.

It makes sense to start with Recollection Number 1, *The Delce*. This is where Edwin's life began.

“It may cause wonderment that in starting these recollections of the city, I should commence with Delce, which although it occupies a very high position geographically, it is perhaps not the most fashionable part of Rochester.

My reason for beginning with Delce is that the first two years of my life were passed there. On the 16th day of July, in the year of Grace one thousand eight hundred and fifty-nine [1859], I was introduced by Dr H.J. Hutchins to my family and friends. As the name of Dr. Hutchins does not occur in the directory of 1858 it is but reasonable to suppose that he, like myself, was a newcomer to the locality.

It is true that I was not consulted as to the place of my nativity, but if I had been asked I feel sure that in my maturer judgement I should have chosen the City of Rochester, to be a citizen of which place I am proud.

Charles Dickens, in *David Copperfield*, says:- ‘I believe the power of observation in numbers of young children to be quite wonderful for its closeness and accuracy. Indeed, I think that most grown men, who are remarkable in this respect, may with greater propriety be said not to have acquired it; the rather, as I generally observe such men to retain a certain freshness, and gentleness, and capacity of being pleased, which are also an inheritance they have preserved from their childhood.’

As a child I was observant and I have many clear memories of events, persons and places of those days. The small brick cottage in which I was born stood at the corner of Delce Lane and the Potato Garden. I mention that it was a 'brick' building for the reason that most of the houses in the locality were either wooden or lath-and-plaster erections.

These houses have all been pulled down. Delce Lane is now named Delce road [sic], it has been widened, paved and lighted and is now as good a road as any to be found in the city. As I remember it, it was quite a rural district with gardens, cowsheds, farm buildings and strawberry gardens, and in some parts were quickset hedges.

Delce road [sic] starts from Star Hill Chapel.

The original article

It may cause wonderment that in starting these recollections of the city I should commence with Delce, which, although it occupies a very high position geographically, is perhaps not the most fashionable part of Rochester.

My reason for beginning with Delce is that the first two years of my life were passed there. On the 16th day of July, in the year of Grace one thousand eight hundred and fifty-nine, I was introduced by Dr. H. J. Hutchins to my family and friends. As the name of Dr. Hutchins does not occur in the directory of 1858 it is but reasonable to suppose that he, like myself, was a newcomer to the locality.

It is true that I was not consulted as to the place of my nativity, but if I had been asked I feel sure that in my maturer judgment I should have chosen the City of Rochester, to be a citizen of which place I am proud.

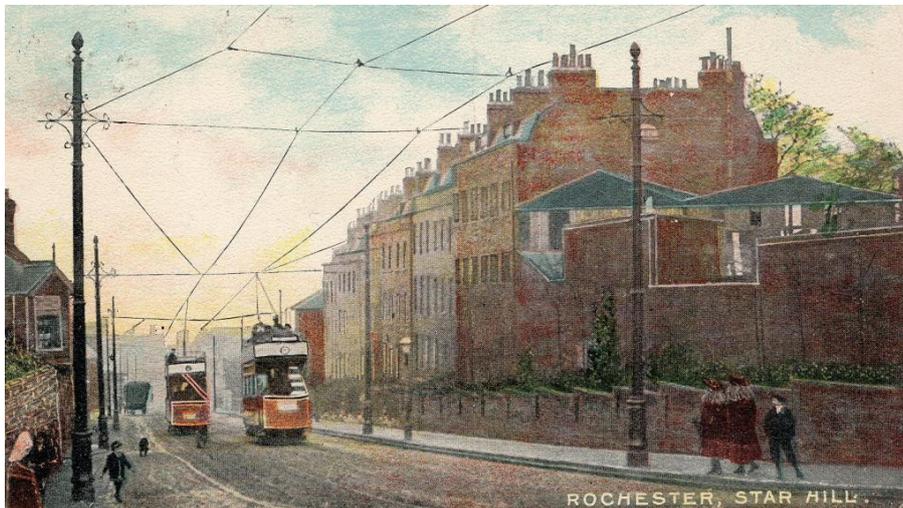
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Delce-road starts from Star Hill Chapel.

A Man of Many Parts - Edwin Harris of Rochester by Pat Salter is available, price £8.95, from the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre, and other local outlets. It can also be purchased direct from the publishers (<http://www.city-of-rochester.org.uk>), the City of Rochester Society, 32 Powlett Road, Frindsbury, Rochester, Kent, ME2 4RD, adding £2.00 for postage and packing. Cheques should be made payable to *The City of Rochester Society*.



Star Hill 1905

*From the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre Couchman Collection:
Star Hill, Rochester.*

Tinted postcard photograph entitled Rochester, Star Hill comprising view of Star Hill looking north-north-west down hill from junction with New Road and Pattens Lane, showing terraced houses on east side of road, trams heading towards and away from camera, tram power line columns and bystanders. On rear, message from M.E[-] to Miss E. Campbell, Fielding, 19 Ross Road, South Norwood Hill, London SE, discussing health matters. Published by Thornton Brothers, New Brompton. Postmarked Rochester 10 June 1905. p.47

Mysterious Medway or: A Ghost Story for Christmas

'Charon'

Stories of the Supernatural abound in Kent and Medway, of course, has its fair share of spectres and apparitions. Many of these ghostly visitors have become part of Medway's folklore. Rochester can boast the shades of Dickens, Cloudsley Shovell and Lady Blanche de Warrenne. Chatham has the phantom drummer boy and the ghosts of The Theatre Royal. St Bartholomew's Hospital has its own haunted casualty room, The Cooper's Arms its ghostly Monk and the sad story of Blue Bell Hill is known to all.

There is, however, the lesser known tales of things that go bump in the night....

At the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre, we hear, from time to time, strange stories, often told with great reluctance by those struggling to make sense of the unfathomable. The enquiry often begins with "I need to know who lived in my house in years gone by," or, "what was on the site of our house before it was built?" Often these are ordinary enquiries from the mildly curious, but sometimes they are the last resort of the terrified few.

What is behind the haunted houses in Princes Park where nobody stays for long and what has it to do with an unknown glue factory? What is the oppressive force felt at the houses in Cats Brain Wood which drives male occupants to despair? Why is the area around Strood Canal basin a haunted triangle? Why did the new owners of a well known historic house in Rochester rue the day they purchased it and then sell up within months? These are but a few of the puzzling questions we have tried to solve at MALSC.

The area around Strood Canal basin has thrown up a series of enquiries relating to the paranormal. Why should this be so? Was there large loss of life during the cutting of the Canal; fatal unrecorded accidents during its construction? Several disturbed occupants of the houses in that area have claimed malevolent forces are at work in their homes. One young couple claim that after several weeks in their new home, they had been driven out by noises, slamming doors and their sofa bursting into flames whilst watching television. Some may blame this on a carelessly discarded cigarette or even, dare we say, an afternoon of burning passion! However it was enough to drive two fairly tough individuals to abandon the house and sleep on the floor at the house of a relative. Several months later another case from a nearby road was related to us. The occupant felt uneasy in his rented accommodation and had sensed, rather than seen, an unknown male. This made him feel very uncomfortable when alone in the premises. Another phantom, further up the hill in Frindsbury, is that of a young girl dressed in a clean white pinafore with an injured bleeding face. She appears so frequently in the kitchen of the house that the occupant has become used to her. A Spiritualist claims the child was killed in an accident in the yard that stood at the back of the house, and some work with the Ordnance Survey maps showed that a yard had originally been sited not far from the house, though nothing further could be proven.

The story of Cats Brain Wood proved equally frustrating. The owner of a fairly new house in Lordswood Lane came in to enquire about the history of the area with particular reference to previous owners of the land. During the course of our investigation, the enquirer, an intelligent and seemingly rational being, became increasingly anxious. He eventually related that he had become so depressed that he was not able to work and was receiving treatment from his doctor. The cause of his depression was his house, or rather the unseen occupant who watched his every move, a presence filled with resentment and hatred. His wife was totally unaware of this entity and was extremely happy in their home, resisting all attempts to be persuaded to sell up and move. The

enquirer had reached the end of his tether, teetering between divorce and suicide. However, new neighbours had moved in next door and within days of their arrival, the new occupant called around and introduced himself. After passing the usual pleasantries, the new neighbour announced that he too hated his house and hoped to move again as soon as he could persuade his wife to do so. He felt idiotic to say so, but had the feeling that something evil was watching him day and night: his wife felt nothing of the kind. After listening to the enquirer's story, they agreed that a previous male owner of the land must be jealously guarding the property, however it was not possible to prove who this owner was. In the end, and as a last resort, the current owners approached the Church and had their properties blessed.

Probably the strangest tale of all is that of a bungalow in the area of Abbott's Court. The owner came along to investigate the old building that his modern home was built upon. The original building must have been very old, he said, as the original footings had what seemed to be Tudor brickwork. A fairly extensive search of maps at MALSC revealed nothing on the site other than agricultural fields up until the 1960s. If an earlier building had been in existence either it was a barn or farm building not noted on the maps, or it had been demolished prior to the 1866 mapping series. Normally this information would have sent the enquirer on his way. Yet he was not willing to take this at face value and asked to speak to me quietly. He then related a story that was very hard to take in. Almost every evening, whilst he sat in his lounge, he claimed a ghostly tableau of soldiers drinking from leather jugs, playing cards and dice appeared before him. At first they were indistinct but as time passed they became more solid, even the colours of their clothing became discernable. He could hear nothing, but they were clearly speaking to each other, laughing and carousing. This would last for upward of an hour. They were, he believed, soldiers from possibly the fifteenth century. The clothing he described was, we believed, from the seventeenth century rather than earlier. Nothing we had in the written histories of the area indicated the billeting of troops during that period. The enquirer became rather agitated and claimed that a clairvoyant had been called in who believed that the soldiers had a connection with William of Orange. We were unable to help further with the enquiry and advised him to contact a local group who investigate paranormal events. Several days later whilst working on another enquiry about the Manors of Hoo, of which Abbott's Court was one, Hasted provided a possible explanation. The Manor once belonged to the Villiers family, being given to Edward Villiers who was much in favour with King William III [of Orange] being knighted in his reign and later made Viscount Villiers of Dartford and Baron of Hoo. We try to keep an open mind – truth is often stranger than fiction!

Our Victorian forebears loved to gather around the fire and tell tales to chill their spines, and we are no different. On that note I leave you, but in parting, if you happen to know who the squat man in Victorian dress with string tied around his knees along New Road is, perhaps you would let the postman know!

Jottings in the Churchyard of All Saints Frindsbury

Tessa Towner, FOMA Chairman



Several years ago Derek Barnard, author of *Merrily to Frindsbury*, wrote in his *Historical Notes* column in the Parish Magazine the following article:

“Between 1899 and 1911, with two later editions of 1930 and 1936, some local and national events were carved into the coping (brick) of the flint wall to the south side (overlooking the towns) of Frindsbury churchyard. They are between the railed vault of Moore and that of Shepherd, with one to the west of the Baker vault.”

In 1986 the Strood Deanery Project produced a folder from All Saints’ Church, listing all those still distinguishable with rubbings of these and the seven which are no longer readable. They numbered the bricks in this section from 1-95 and I have kept the same numbers.

- 3 Marlboro Inn burnt down March 26 1899
- 5 Frindsbury Church -?
- 9 Old George died July 25 1903
- 13 Maybrick released 1901
- 15 To Gravesend July 23 1904
- 21 Apted was hanged March 18 1902
- 22 Railway Bridge burnt down June 29 1914
- 25 R101 crashed Oct 1 1930
- 33 Samuel Edwards was sentenced to 6 months at Rochester Nov 1907
- 34 Stanley joined the Navy May 28 1908
- 38 Andy Sevenoaks. Murder of Mrs Laurd 1908
- 41 Marlboro burnt down 1899. H.Hedges sentenced to 10yers Nov 20 1909
Save me
- 42 Entrance to Frindsbury church repaved June 16 1908
- 56 G.Frost, High Jump, Rochester Bridge. Lee and Wood Released on 18 December 1908
- 79 Bell Inn reopened A.V Oct 2 1907
- 81 Rochester Tramways commenced Aug 31 1907
- 91 Robert Dray hanged himself 20 March 1909
- 93 Explosion 26 1911. 8 killed several injured. W.D. killed at work June 18 1908.
Cliffe explosion June 4 1908 2 killed
- 94 Clock erected on church Sept 1911
- 95 Weidmann guillottien for 6 murder 14.8.1936

Although at the time of writing this article Derek asked if anyone would like to research some of these events there was no response, so I decided to see what information could be found on some of these items now. I recall as a child looking at these on the church wall, having been shown them by my father, a former Churchwarden at All Saints’. They are no longer visible, being covered in ivy.

Number 5: what happened at Frindsbury Church that prompted this one? Number 9: who was ‘Old George’? A search of the burial records of All Saints’ failed to reveal who he might have been: he wasn’t buried there. Number 15: who went to Gravesend that day? Number 34: who was the Stanley who joined the navy?

Some of these we will never know. Neither will we know who or what was behind the jottings on the wall, or why they were done. So....

Number 3: Marlboro Inn burnt down March 26 1899

The story behind this one was discovered in the Chatham News, dated April 1st 1899, and what a tragedy it was. The headline, *Fatal Fire at Frindsbury*, went on to tell that the landlady, a Mrs Norman, had been 'cremated' in the fire which totally destroyed the Marlborough Head Inn in the early hours of Sunday morning, 26th March 1899; her husband managed to escape after frantically searching for his wife, without success. The report in the *Chatham News* gives many names of those involved: the neighbours, fire service personnel and the policemen who attended. The Chatham News can be searched on microfilm at MALSC.

Number 13: Maybrick released

This refers to the release of Florence Maybrick who had been convicted of poisoning her husband, James Maybrick, at the Liverpool Assizes in a case that caught the national interest. Florence was sentenced to death in 1889, the sentence commuted to life imprisonment, and Florence spent 15 years in Woking and Aylesbury prisons before finally being released in 1904, not 1901 as stated on the wall. Later it was thought, (after a diary appeared purporting to be that of James Maybrick), that he may have been Jack the Ripper! Florence returned to her native America after her release and died in Kent Connecticut 23 October 1941 aged 79. For more on this story search the internet.



Florence and John Maybrick (from Wikipedia)

Number 21: Apted was hanged March 18 1902

On New Year's Eve 1901 a little girl aged seven and a half was found brutally murdered at Vauxhall, Southborough, near Tonbridge Wells. She was Frances Eliza O'Rourke and was found on the morning of New Year's Day 1902 in a pond at Vauxhall with her throat cut. Harold Apted, aged 20, son of a coal merchant from Tunbridge, was charged with her murder and this article appeared in the Times newspaper of 27th February 1902:

The Tonbridge Murder

At Maidstone Assizes yesterday before Mr Justice Wright the trial was concluded of Harold Apted 20 charged with the murder of a little girl named Frances O'Rourke at Vauxhall near Tonbridge on December 31st last.

The jury found the prisoner guilty, but recommended him to mercy. Sentence of death was passed.

It is stated that after the sentence Apted confessed his guilt, and he was executed at Maidstone on 18th March 1902.

Number 38: Andy Sevenoaks. Murder of Mrs Luard 1908.

Caroline Mary Luard (died 24th August 1908) was the victim of an unsolved murder known as the *Luards Case* or the *Seal Chart Murder*, after she was mysteriously shot and killed at her isolated summerhouse in a heavily wooded area near Sevenoaks, Kent. She and her husband lived at Ightham Knoll. Her husband, Major General Charles Edward Luard, later discovered her body and was eventually accused of her death after the authorities failed to find a suspect; he committed suicide soon after. It has since been suggested that a likely suspect may have been John Dickman, who was hanged for shooting and killing a passenger on a train in 1910. John Dickman (died August 10th 1910) was convicted of the murder of John Nisbet on a train from Newcastle on Tyne. Nisbet was carrying a bag containing the wages for a colliery; someone had shot him and stole his bag. There was some doubt over the conviction, as it appeared to some people to rest on inconclusive identification evidence. It has been suggested that Dickman was also guilty of two previous murders, of Caroline Mary Luard in 1908 and a Jewish moneylender in Sunderland in 1909, but nothing has ever been proved. The Times Index provided pages of information on this case and the others that I have found; this case was reported almost daily throughout August and September of that year.

Number 91: Robert Dray hanged himself 20 March 1909.

The Chatham News, April 1909, reported on the inquest of James Robert Dray, a fish hawkker aged 56 of 76 Frindsbury Road, Frindsbury. His wife Mary had found him hanging in their garden shed. James had complained of headaches which had occurred regularly since he had had an eye removed due to coal getting into his eye while working on the coal boats. He had also had three operations for cancer of his spine. The coroner's jury returned a verdict of 'suicide during temporary insanity'.

Number 93: Explosion 26 1911. 8 killed several injured. W.D. killed at work June 18 1908.

A search in *The Chatham News*, yet again, produced the answers to this one. In July 1911 an explosion occurred at Messrs Curtis and Harvey's Explosives factory at Cliffe. Three men were killed and several injured.

4th June 1908 Yet another explosion at Curtis & Harvey's Explosives works at Cliffe, this time two women were killed: Clara Goodyer age 22 and Julia Munn age 18. There were several columns in the newspapers reporting what had happened. Clara was earning the grand sum of 15/- a week (with overtime!) working in this hostile environment from 6am till 8pm some days with just two half hour breaks during the day. This factory out on the Cliffe marshes had, on several occasions, had explosions where there had been several deaths since the turn of the century.

Number 94: Clock erected on church Sept 1911.

This was the erection of the clock on the front of the church tower (see photograph), put there by the family of Frederick Baker, who together with his brother lived at Manor farm, and started at 4pm Saturday 10th September 1911.



All Saints' Church Frindsbury

And finally...

Number 95: Weidmann guillotien for 6 murder 14.8.1936.

Somebody felt that this was worth a mention. It refers to Eugen Weidmann, convicted in France of murdering six women. An entry in *The Times* of 19th June 1939, not 1936 as on the wall states, 'Eugen Weidmann the young German who committed six murders was guillotined outside the prison at Versailles on Saturday. Crowds gathered in a vain attempt to get a view of the proceedings, and their behaviour was subject of bitter comment in the Press yesterday.' How gruesome!

Watts' Alms Houses Reminiscences

Norma Crowe, Local Studies Librarian.



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

With the help of Kelly's Directories, street maps and old photographs, Rochester as it used to be is re-lived by some, and experienced for the first time by others, most notably Local Studies Librarian Norma Crowe, who came to Rochester for the first time in 1994. Verbal reminiscences have been recorded and transcribed by volunteer Betty Cole.

Visitors to Rochester High Street today could be forgiven for thinking that local residents spend much of their time having their hair re-styled and a great deal of money on dining out, buying books, antiques and bric-a-brac. The type of retail outlets on Rochester High Street in 2007 are mainly concerned with leisure activities. It was not always so. Within living memory Rochester boasted the full range of shops, from grocer to department store, from small to large. Just about anything you needed could be purchased somewhere there.

Local Studies staff from MALSC have been privileged to meet with a small group of residents of Watts' Almshouses to recall Rochester High Street when it was a vibrant shopping centre and busy with traffic.



Watts' Almshouses residents reminisce

Most have memories of Rochester during the '50s, '60s and '70s, but some could remember Rochester during the 1939-45 War and before. Here is a short extract from one of the reminiscence sessions. The leader (Norma Crowe) is referring to Kelly's Directory for Rochester High Street:

Participant:

No. 75 was Lane's Toy Shop. It was there for many, many years.

Norma:

And next to it at 77 was Summers: Stationers, Printers and office equipment specialists. Now that's in large writing in here which usually means they think it's an important shop.

Participants:

It was.

Norma:

What sort of things would you get there?

Participants:

Office equipment. It was desks and chairs and typewriters. Also pencils, cards and fountain pens and paperclips, everything really. It moved to Chatham along where Featherstones used to be then it moved to Frindsbury and then it died out.

Norma:

Then next to Summers was Patricia's Pantry. Licensed Restaurant and Hotel.

Participants:

That was very nice.

My friend had her wedding reception there. It was still there in 1959. It still had Georgian features in it then, especially the Georgian iron balcony on the outside. It was very nice in there. The restaurant was downstairs; it was a very classic sort of place. Palm trees. It was a bit up-market for want of a better word.

We used to peep in the window and think I'd love to go in there and have a meal. Couldn't afford it!

Norma: What is it today?

It's the Inside Out Shop.



From The Chatham Observer, 2nd March 1962, © Kent Messenger Group. Photograph reproduced with the kind permission of Barry Hollis and the Kent Messenger Group.

The Rochester High Street Project

The aim of this ambitious project is to collate information sources on Rochester High Street buildings. We are collecting photographs, plans, anecdotes, information on the buildings and their residents and any other attendant material. We hope to take a series of photographs of the buildings in 2007/8 to add to our photographic collection and bring it up to date. The material gathered at the Watts' Almshouses reminiscence sessions will form part of the High Street project.

The Lost Manor of Ware: A New Book on 600 Years of Street's History

This article has been reproduced with the kind permission of the Kent Archaeological Society (<http://www.kentarchaeology.org.uk>).

*The secrets of Maidstone's 'Lost Manor of Ware' – known today as Ware Street – have been revealed in a new book by local historian and author, Kathryn Kersey. Kathryn began researching the histories of Thurnham and Bearsted seven years ago and has previously published *At School at Bearsted (2003)* and *Bearsted and Thurnham Remembered (2005)*. She is married to Malcolm, a civil engineer, and has two sons, James and George. She is assistant leader of Bearsted Beaver Scouts, assistant leader of North Downs Young Archaeologists, a member of the Council of the Kent Archaeological Society, and the Bearsted and District Local History Society.*

Allen Grove, who died in 1990, was curator of Maidstone Museum for many years and the Kent Archaeological Society's honorary curator from 1949 to 1975 and president from 1987 to 1988. He left a legacy to the Kent Archaeological Society (KAS) for the establishment of the Allen Grove Local History Fund to promote research, preservation and the enjoyment of local history. Grants of up to £400 a year from an annual fund of £1,400 are made to individuals and local societies for publications, exhibitions, oral histories, and archiving and research projects.

Ware Street - the street - runs through the middle of Thurnham parish, from Bearsted Green to Weaving Street and Hockers Lane, and although it is less than a mile long and part of a busy commuter route, it contains many clues to the days when it was a sleepy hamlet, deep in the county town's countryside.

'It was a medieval manor owned by Rochester cathedral,' explains Kathryn, who lived in a 17th century cottage in the street when she was a schoolgirl. 'The earliest surviving records I found were some Latin documents, more than 600 years old, in Medway Archives Office.

'They were very fragile and were about to be withdrawn from public inspection, perhaps for several years. Luckily I was able to have them transcribed and translated before they were taken away to be repaired by conservation specialists'.



Kathryn Kersey, local historian and author of 'The Lost Manor of Ware', at Ware Street

This vital aspect of Kathryn's research was made possible by a grant from the Kent Archaeological Society's Allen Grove Local History Fund.

In her book Kathryn takes readers on a walk along the street, describing how the manor evolved over the centuries and identifying its historic properties and buildings. She also brings to light the manor's surprising links with such nationally important historical events as the Jack Cade Rebellion in 1450 and the 'Swing Riots' on Kent's farms in 1830.

The careers of local traders and craftsmen are covered and although farming was the main occupation along old Ware Street, it once had an important ragstone quarry and brickworks, whose ruined engine shed Kathryn discovered and photographed.

There are also oral history contributions and extracts from local newspapers, parish magazines and census returns – and more than 200 photographs supplied by past and present residents and members of Bearsted and District Local History Society.

Ware Street still holds a few secrets. No manorial documents for the years 1399 – 1610 have been traced and Kathryn doubts if the story of these ‘missing years’ will ever be completed.

The Lost Manor of Ware, ISBN 978-0-9545831-3-2; 262 pages, paperback, costs £17 inc. postage and packing and can be ordered from Kathryn at 5 Greensand Road, Bearsted, Maidstone, Kent ME15 8NY. Enquiries to mjkersey@tiscali.co.uk or telephone 01622 730444. The book is also on sale at Waterstone's, Fremlin Walk Shopping Centre, Maidstone.

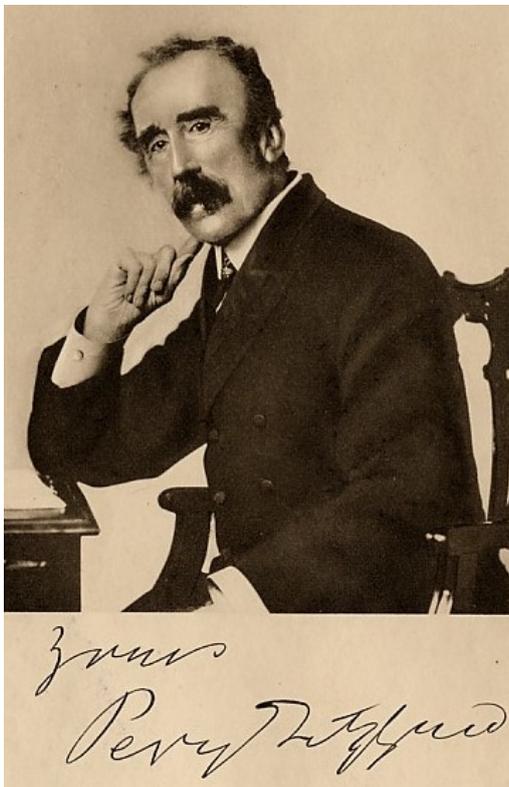
Percy Fitzgerald and the study of Charles Dickens

Norma Crowe, Local Studies Librarian.



In her second article in this issue of The Clock Tower, Norma Crowe explains how the Medway Archives and Local Studies' Dickens Collection has been enhanced by the recent transfer of the Fitzgerald collection of Dickensiana from the Guildhall Museum.

Charles Dickens has long been associated with, and celebrated by, the Medway Towns. His connections with Chatham date back to his childhood, when his father worked in the pay office of the Dockyard. The area created a lasting impression upon him, reflected in both his writings and in his purchase of Gadshill at Higham in 1858; a house which he had admired from boyhood, and which became his home until his death in 1870.



Percy Fitzgerald

These connections explain our interest in Charles Dickens' writing and his life, and explain why former colleagues at Rochester Library devoted time, energy and substantial funds to creating a special Dickens collection. The collection covers many aspects of Dickens' life and works, and is an important resource for scholars of 19th century English Literature. It was transferred to MALSC when the Centre opened in 1992, and we have continued to add important new works to it, as funds allow.

This year our existing Dickens Collection has been enhanced by the transfer of the Fitzgerald collection of Dickensiana from the Guildhall Museum. Percy Fitzgerald was a personal friend of Charles Dickens, and was a devotee of his writings. Amongst the 400 volumes are some works of literary criticism; poems and songs based on Dickens' characters; sequels to Dickens' stories written by other admirers; obscure and foreign editions of the great author's books. In 1911, when he was 80 years

old, Percy Fitzgerald donated this unique collection to the City of Rochester. It was housed in its own bookcase in Eastgate Museum. When the museum moved to the Guildhall the Fitzgerald collection went too.

Having carried out an inventory and reassessment of the holdings at the Museum, curatorial staff came to the conclusion last year that the Fitzgerald collection should be relocated. It was under-used and largely unknown, and frankly, being a printed book collection, did not fulfil the collecting remit of the Museum. Suitable locations for the collection's new home were sought. Synergy with courses in 19th English Literature gave the University of Kent at Canterbury a strong case. But staff at MALSC and at the Museum, were sure that the rightful home was here at MALSC. After all Percy Fitzgerald had given this his personal Dickens library to the City in perpetuity. We have a duty of care to preserve and promote it to scholars throughout the world.

So we have his books, but what of the man?

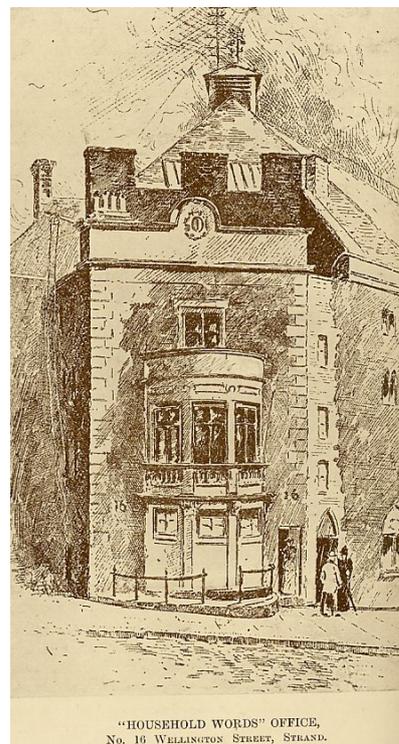
Percy Fitzgerald was born in Ireland in 1831. He was a solicitor, sculptor, critic and a prolific writer. He came to the notice of Charles Dickens when he was a young man. He was one of the group who worked with Dickens and helped to make *Household Words* the success that it was. He had a reputation for working fast, for his vast output, but regrettably for his inaccuracies or carelessness. Charles Dickens once wrote to him,

For my sake- if not for Heaven's-do, I ENTREAT YOU, look over your manuscript before sending it to the printer. Its condition involves us all in hopeless confusion, and really occasions great unnecessary cost.

Fitzgerald wrote about 30 novels and at least 11 books about Dickens and his literary circle, together with biographies of Garrick, Sterne, Sheridan and Boswell. In 1903 he became the first President of the Dickens Fellowship at the age of 73, and was a generous contributor to the Fellowship's funds. When the first Dickens Exhibition was held in 1902 he delighted to provide many artefacts for display. Fitzgerald's last book was published in 1913, and he died at the ripe old age of 96.

We are grateful to him for his generosity in giving his unique collection to Rochester to be available to Dickens scholars in perpetuity.

The Household Words Office from Memories of Charles Dickens by Percy Fitzgerald published 1913; The Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre



The Victoria County History at MALSC



Dr Sandra Dunster was appointed by the University of Greenwich as Kent Team Leader for the Victoria County History's England's Past for Everyone (EPE) in October 200, succeeding Dr Andrew Hann. She previously taught local and regional history at the University of Kent. Sandra was born and raised in Whitstable and, after 25 years absence, returned to live there in 1999. Her grandparents moved to the Medway towns in the 1930s and she has fond childhood memories of the area from summer holidays spent with them in the 1950s and '60s.

Celebrating the Achievements of Volunteer Researchers on the VCH Project

On 27th October 2007 an event was held at the University of Greenwich Medway Campus to celebrate and showcase the work of the volunteers who have made such a significant contribution to the Victoria County History's (VCH) *EPE* project on the Lower Medway Valley. Dr John Dunne from the University of Greenwich introduced the day, welcoming the volunteers to their celebration and thanking them for their hard work over the past two years. Dr Andrew Hann, the outgoing Kent Team Leader, went on to review the Kent project's activities and achievements and the national project's education and skills manager Aretha George talked about the important role played by volunteer researchers across the country.

Several of the volunteers then gave a fascinating insight into the work they had done. Linda Brinklow explained her work on the local newspapers, Dr Andrew Ashbee, Honorary Curator of Snodland Millennium Museum and the Chairman of Snodland Historical Society, who led the census group, put Snodland in the spotlight and John Vigar and John Newman talked about the organisation and the findings of the village buildings' survey. Roger Smoothy was persuaded to explain the methods he had developed to retrieve photographs of stunning clarity from damaged glass slides. Finally there were a few words from Stephen Dixon, Borough Archivist, about the new project to open up the Rochester City Archives.

The day also marked the end of Dr Andrew Hann's leadership of the volunteer programme, although he is currently finishing the writing of the forthcoming book *Life and Work in the Lower Medway Valley, 1750-1900*, to be published as a VCH *EPE* paperback in 2008 and he will also be on the steering committee of the new project.

The new VCH *EPE* project: *A History of the Medway Towns*

As leader of the new VCH Kent project, which aims to produce an interesting and accessible paperback history of the Medway Towns by 2010, I feel very lucky to follow on from Andrew and inherit the sound foothold that he has established for VCH Kent in the Medway area. It was good to meet many of the volunteers at the celebration on 27th October and I feel confident that the volunteer programme will make as significant a contribution to this project as it did to the previous one.

Although I hope that many of the volunteers from the previous project will continue to work on the Medway Towns, there is always room for new volunteers to join the project and a variety of ways in which you might get involved. If you are interested, or want to know more, please get in touch.

At this stage in the planning, the parameters of the Medway Towns project are still up for discussion and I would be interested to hear reader's views on the time scale for study that they feel would be appropriate and also what are 'The Medway Towns'? I plan to get the research programme underway early in 2008 so please take this opportunity to make your contribution to the shape of this exciting new project.

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Editor's Footnotes

Amanda Thomas is a freelance writer and public relations consultant. Born in Chatham, but now based in Hertfordshire, she belongs to several historical organisations, including the Kent Family History Society, the North West Kent Family History Society, and The Council for British Archaeology; she has a degree in Italian from the University of Kent and is a member of their alumni association.



Christmas is a time for families, and apparently this year, upside down Christmas trees. This, however, will come as no surprise to those of us of an archaeological bent familiar with the inverted oak discovered at the centre of the Bronze Age Seahenge site at Holme-next-the-Sea in Norfolk. Archaeologists believe that the inverted oak at the centre of this ritual site was felled around 2049 BC, and one wonders if families even then came together to eat, drink and pull Bronze Age crackers.

The current revival in the study of family history means that sometimes Christmas can come at unexpected times of the year. The popularity of genealogical websites and message boards means that today we can track down long-forgotten family members and organise reunions. This year it happened to me. For some time I had been conversing by email to a third cousin, Jill Hamilton, in Canada, and at the end of the summer she announced that she and her parents would be visiting England. Not only that, but she wanted to 'get everyone together'. It was with some trepidation that I, my parents and children set off to Bexleyheath in September. Readers of this column will know that my mother's family hails from Cliffe and the cousins we were about to meet all share a common ancestor, Sarah Brenchley, née Laws, born in 1834 (see *The Clock Tower* Issue 02, June 2006). We had always known that Sarah must have been a warm and lively character as affectionate tales of her had been passed down the family. Even her death had been eventful, as she had died laughing at a New Year's Eve party in Cliffe in 1917.

There was quite a party waiting for us in Bexleyheath, but we could never have anticipated the impact our arrival caused and we were immediately put at our ease. My mother's second cousin, Ken Dunmall, was waiting at the door, and as she emerged from the car he exclaimed, "You look exactly like my mother!" Not only that, but he looked exactly like my mother's first cousin, Lewis Rogers. The similarities and coincidences continued all day as we female descendants of Sarah Laws discovered that we all shared that same loud laugh and gregarious nature. We all love singing and needlework – though the latter common trait was blown apart when it was revealed that Sarah Laws could not even thread a needle.



The best was yet to come. After lunch we travelled in convoy from Bexleyheath to Cliffe. Lewis Rogers, was waiting for us all outside the Six Bells pub. The Canadian contingent arrived first, and as we pulled into the carpark, we saw Lewis and his second cousin, Ken Dunmall, standing arm in arm chatting as if they had know each other all their lives.

From left to right: Second cousins Ken Dunmall and Lewis Rogers outside the Six Bells pub, Cliffe

Lewis gathered everyone around him and produced a briefcase, which he opened with great relish. Inside was a photograph of a lady and a gentleman in late Victorian dress. "I have no idea who these people are," he declared, "but my father had the portrait on his dining room wall for years." We crowded closer around, each one of us photographing the photograph, and agreeing that for the first time we were probably looking at an early, undiscovered portrait of our common ancestors, Sarah Laws and Edward Brenchley.

In the days and weeks that followed, the Dunmalls sadly returned to Canada and we third cousins set to work by email. It is true that you never know who or what you are going to discover at a family reunion, but to discover a third cousin who is a forensic scientist is quite a bonus. Heather Burnett was used to comparing facial characteristics using forensic techniques. We already had a photograph of Sarah Laws taken shortly before her death, but we could not be certain that Lewis' portrait was definitely of her. Heather was able to prove that it was. Not only that, but she was also able to establish where the photograph had been taken by comparing our own photographs of buildings in Cliffe and one of Walnut Tree Cottage in Wharf Lane featured in Alan Cherry's book *A Pictorial History of Cooling and Cliffe*. We knew that Sarah and Edward had lived at Walnut Tree Cottage, not just from census records, but because Edward had died there. His death certificate of 1881 states, "Probably shock to the system caused by an accidental fall out of a walnut tree."



Sarah Brenchley pictured circa 1861-1881 standing in the doorway of Walnut Tree cottage.

Forensic analysis conducted by Heather Burnett using a photograph of Sarah Brenchley owned by Lewis Rogers and a photograph from page 14 of Allan Cherry's book, A Pictorial History of Cooling and Cliffe, published in 1998 by Martins News of Cliffe (published with the kind permission of Allan Cherry).

Fascinated by these hitherto unknown photographs, I was intrigued by Edward's portrait. I decided to send Heather a photograph of my son in a similar pose and she happily repeated the extraordinary forensic techniques. Swiftly, she discovered that the position of their eyes, noses and mouths was identical - absolute proof that the photographs in Lewis' briefcase were indeed portraits of our great grandparents.

From the Archives...



If you know where these photographs were taken and if you have a story to tell about the people or locations, please contact Norma Crowe, Local Studies Librarian, at:
Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre, Civic Centre, Strood, Rochester, Kent ME2 4AU ;
email: archives@medway.gov.uk ; telephone: 01634 332714.

Happy Christmas and a prosperous New Year



John Thomas Hawes, Mayor of Chatham, dressed as Father Christmas distributing Christmas gifts to children inside the National Theatre cinema, Chatham, circa 1938 to 1939.

If you would like to join the Friends of Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre, please contact Lisa Birch, Membership Secretary, Medway Archives Office, Civic Centre, Strood, Rochester, Kent ME2 4AU. Telephone +44 (0)1634 332238; email lisa.birch@medway.gov.uk.