

Roll out the Red Carpet

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Roll out the Red Carpet is a compilation of work originally undertaken by Pat for an exhibition at the Medway Archives in Strood, Kent, and gives a fascinating insight into royal visits to the Medway Towns over the centuries, from Anglo Saxon times right up to the present day.

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Introduction

The red carpet has been rolled out, literally or metaphorically, for royal visitors to the Medway area for centuries. However, the red carpet has not always been a celebratory one. Wars, sieges, rebellions and invasions have been occasioned by, or resulted in, carpets of blood.

The Medway area has been inhabited since ancient times but the first royal visitor that we know of, with any certainty, was Aethelbert, King of Kent, in 604 and the latest, at the time of writing, that of the Princess Royal in March 2011.

Chapter 1: Anglo Saxons

The admirable Bede described Aethelberht, King of Kent as *an able, powerful, and open-minded ruler who had a Christian Queen [Berta] unrestrained in her religious faith and practice* and had the cathedral church of St Andrew built at Rochester *from its foundations*. So it is reasonable to suppose that the king and queen were present at the consecration celebrations in 604. Augustine, Archbishop of Canterbury, installed Justus, one of the monks who had accompanied him from Rome, in 597, as the first Bishop of Rochester. The cathedral was named in honour of St Andrew's College, Rome from which St Augustine and his brethren came to England¹. King Aethelberht presented many gifts to Justus and the cathedral including *Prestefeld and all the land from the Medway to the East gate of the city and all the lands outside the city walls on the north*².

Conflict brought King Alfred to Rochester in 883. Asser relates that part of the Viking army entered Kent, sailed up the River Medway and besieged Rochester where they constructed a strong fortification, including two siege towers in front of its entrance. Despite this they were unable to capture the city due to the courageous defence by the citizens and the aid of King Alfred who arrived, with a large army from Wessex. As a result the Vikings abandoned their fortress, leaving behind all the horses and most of their weapons and prisoners as they fled to their ships³.

In 986 conflict again occasioned a royal visit. Godwin II, Bishop of Rochester quarrelled with King Aethelred (968 – 1016) who *had no veneration for the ecclesiastics*. Angry with the bishop's defiance, the king attacked Rochester. However, it was too well defended by the citizens who sided with the bishop, and so the king turned his anger on the diocese, or, as the Anglo Saxon Chronicles put it, *did for the bishopric*⁴.

Dunstan, the Archbishop of Canterbury, *roused from his meditations* at Canterbury, could not allow this attack on the church and interposed on her behalf. However his spiritual threats, including the vengeance of St Andrew, were not only ineffectual but caused the King to prosecute his attack more fiercely.

Dunstan then resorted to pecuniary measures and succeeded by offering 100 pounds of silver. Aethelred accepted the money, abandoned the attack and departed; we are told, *regardless of the anathemas which Dunstan poured forth against him for his avarice and impiety*.⁵

Chapter 2: Normans

It is possible that William I passed through the area on his way to and from London. However, there does not appear to be a record of any such visit. Members of his family were certainly here. After William's death a dispute arose as to the succession between William's eldest son, Robert (Curthose) and his second surviving son, William (Rufus).

Robert was aided by William's half brother, Odo, Bishop of Bayeux and Earl of Kent who in 1088, according to the Anglo Saxon Chronicles, *fared into Kent to his earldom and destroyed it quickly, and the king's land and the Archbishop's, and brought all the goods to his castle at Rochester*¹. King William II besieged Rochester in June of that year, with a force he had gathered from *all over England*, by forbidding all unjust taxes and promised them better laws.

The king, as reported by William of Malmesbury, set up two siege castles to block any exit or entrance. As the expected French forces, promised by Robert, failed to arrive, Odo was unable to hold the castle and so retreated and returned to France.

Five years later William II was back in Rochester for a meeting with Anselm, Abbott of Bec, to resolve their conflict over Anselm's refusal to accept the position of Archbishop of Canterbury². With the mediation of Gundulf, Bishop of Rochester, Anselm, with only two of his three conditions met, accepted and was consecrated Archbishop.

Celebrations brought Henry I, the fourth son of William I and the third one to be King of England, to Rochester in 1130. The rebuilt cathedral church and newly built priory of St Andrew were consecrated by the Archbishop of Canterbury (William of Corbeil), who had the Castle Keep built in 1127, in the presence of the King on 8 May, though the celebrations must have been overshadowed by a fire that had destroyed much of the city the previous day. The king's contribution to the festivities was a grant of the royal church at Boxley.³

Chapter 3: Plantagenets

King Richard I probably passed through the area on his way to the third crusade in 1191. The city archives include a grant of exchequer referring to free passage of his troops through Rochester.

There were great celebrations in 1195 when Richard I was once again in Rochester, accompanied by his mother, Eleanor of Aquitaine, on his return from the Holy Land. The king's return had been interrupted the year before when he had been captured by his enemy Duke Leopold of Austria who imprisoned him and demanded a ransom for his release. The ransom finally paid, Richard landed in Sandwich and returned to London via Rochester where Hubert Walter (Chancellor and Archbishop of Canterbury) and a vast crowd awaited them¹.

According to F.F. Smith, King John, between 1199 and 1216, *resided in Rochester altogether thirty-five days*. In 1215 conflict brought John to Rochester during the barons' rebellion following the king's refutation of *Magna Carta*. William D'Albini, one of the charter barons, took possession of the castle which immediately brought the King and his army to Rochester². They arrived on the 12th October, where they found the bridge defended by Robert FitzWalter and sixty knights. However, John's forces prevailed. They took the bridge, destroyed it behind them and entered the city the following day. The soldiers ate, drank and even stabled their horses in the cathedral. Despite the use of all siege weapons available at that time, including five throwing machines, *hurling stones against them unceasingly, both day and night* so that the walls were broken down and only the keep stood, the rebels held out for seven weeks. On 25th November the King wrote to Hubert de Burgh³ instructing him to *send to us night and day with all haste forty bacon pigs of the fattest and those less good for eating for bringing fire under the tower*⁴. The plan was successful; the corner of the keep collapsed and John seized the castle.

The following year John was succeeded by his son, Henry III, who held a tournament at Rochester on 8th December 1251. It is believed to have been held in fields south east of the city. A description in a local history of 1772 described the occasion thus:

*They exhibited the splendour courage and address, and the beauty of the times. The English held the lists against all comers and it is reported, were so successful that they forced the foreigners with shame and confusion, to retire into the city; and as if that were not a sufficient shelter for them they were compelled to seek safety in the castle*⁵.

Ten years later Henry was at Rochester during troubles over England's possessions in France. A letter Henry sent from Rochester to King Louis of France dated 25th May 1261, included: *if any shorted way of peace, more suitable to us and our realm can be found, we propose to pursue it*⁶.

In 1297 conflict with Ireland, Scotland, Wales and France had depleted King Edward I finances. The king's solution was an order for a seizure of 8,000 woolsacks and the imposition of another tax. This brought the threat of rebellion from within to add to the threat of invasion from France. Edward's thirteen-year-old son was at Rochester when, in August, the king sent 170 armed knights to his son⁷.

King Edward I made a more congenial overnight visit to the area on 18th February 1300 during a progress through Kent. He offered seven shillings each day at the shrine of Saint William of Perth. On the following day the king also paid twelve shillings to Richard Lamberd of Rochester in recompense for the horse he hired that was blown over the bridge and drowned in the River Medway. Eight days later, on his return from Canterbury, the king again visited the cathedral where he offered seven shillings to the shrines of St Paulinus and St Ythamar. At Chatham, he offered the same amount to the *image of the blessed Mary*; the same sum was also offered by Prince Edward⁸.

A further invasion of Scotland by King Edward I in 1306 led to another royal visitor to Rochester castle. Members of Scotland's royal family were captured and transported to London for trial .

Included among the prisoners was Elizabeth de Burgh, wife of the King (Robert the Bruce). She was held in various English castles during her eight years' imprisonment, although she was kept in relative comfort. In 1313 the queen was held in Rochester castle where the Constable was ordered to provide a suitable chamber and was paid twenty shillings per week for her maintenance. She was also allowed to have four servants⁹.

As the daughter of Edward's friend, Richard de Burgh, Earl of Ulster, Elizabeth fared much better than her sister-in-law, Mary; or Isabel, Countess of Buchan, who were held in wooden cages hung on the outside of towers at Roxburgh and Berwick Castles, respectively¹⁰.

Addendum

King John was in Rochester on Maundy Thursday in 1213. According to the Royal Almonry this was the earliest record of a Royal Maundy. This was subsequently proved wrong when recent research revealed a record of a 'royal presentation' by King John at Knaresborough in 1210.

Chapter 4: Tudors

King Henry VII passed through Rochester, on his way from Windsor to Sandwich, three times between 1492 and 1498, during which period the bridge seems to have been in disrepair since he paid two pounds each time for the *fery bote*. In 1498 he also paid five pounds *to the Mayr of Rochester towards the Bridge there*.¹

More power struggles in Europe brought King Henry VIII to the area on 22 June 1522 during a *stately progress*² with Charles V, Emperor of Germany. The Emperor, in need of an ally against the rise of Lutherism in Germany and the advance of the Turks, sought an alliance with England.³

Henry and Charles stayed overnight at Rochester⁴ on their way to Windsor to negotiate arrangements for treaties for the invasion of France and to cement the alliance the Emperor's marriage to King Henry's daughter, the Princess Mary. Neither the invasion nor the marriage took place.

Henry returned at the end of December 1540 to meet his new bride, Anne of Cleves, who had arrived in England and was housed in the King's Palace, at Rochester, in what had been, until the dissolution of the monasteries, St Andrew's Priory. He found Anne standing at a window watching bull-baiting in the court below.⁵ Henry's eagerness to meet Anne turned to disappointment when he found that Holbein's portrait of Anne had exaggerated her looks.

Queen Elizabeth I spent five days in the area in 1573 on her return to London during a cold and wet summer progress round the coast of Kent and Sussex. The Queen arrived on 18 September at the Crown Inn. The following day she attended Divine Service and heard a sermon at the Cathedral where £13. 13. 4d⁶ was spent on the festivities. On her last day she was entertained at the home of *that charitable man*, Richard Watts, M.P. for the city, on Boley Hill.⁷

The Queen made a return visit on 1 February 1583. This time she was accompanied by the Duke of Anjou who was en route to Dover and a return to France. In 1568, during the conflicts with Spain, negotiations had begun for a marriage between Elizabeth and the Duke in an attempt to cement an Anglo-French alliance. Although the queen appeared to be fond of the Duke (she referred to him as her 'monkey') the negotiations came to nothing in the face of insurmountable religious differences. During their visit the Queen and her 'monkey' visited Chatham, *the strong point and rendezvous of the London area*,⁸ to view the ships of war.

Chapter 5: Hanover

It was possibly conflict and conciliation that brought the Dukes of Sussex and Clarence to Rochester in the early nineteenth century, to be enrolled as Honorary Freemen of Rochester.

William Henry, Duke of Clarence (later to be William IV), was the only son of George III not to have a military career. Because of his more liberal views and sympathy for the various reform movements he was known to be out of favour with his father and the government. Revolution and Reform were in the air at that time and had been for some years. Rebellion, due primarily to the Corn Laws which protected large landowners in times of poor harvests, by raising prices, and shortage of food for the rest of the population led to the formation of the Anti Corn Law League. Radical pamphlets were showered on the public concerning Catholic emancipation, slavery and franchise.

The Medway area was not immune to this. In 1793 there was a riot at Chatham over the price of meat, which had been supported by the local militia¹. The Patriotic Society of Rochester had been banned² and on 14 October 1811 a committee was appointed to inquire into the *causes of the late outrageous proceedings in the city who conceived it not only to be their duty in the present Situation of Public Affairs but feel it their strong inclination to cooperate with the neighbouring magistrates in suppressing all seditious meetings* and ordered that all inhabitants of Rochester should report any knowledge of such³.

On 18 November 1816 the Corporation met at one o'clock at the Guildhall, and having finished their ordinary business at half past two they robed and, preceded by their sergeants and Peace Officers, went to the Crown Inn to receive the Duke of Sussex who was accompanied by several dignitaries including the Lord Mayor of London. After mutual introductions a procession was formed for the return to the Guildhall. The Duke was on the right of the Mayor, followed by the Aldermen, the Town Clerk and Assistants. In the Guildhall the Duke was on the right of the Mayor when the Town Clerk administered the oath of an honorary freeman. The Lord Mayor of London was also enrolled as an Honorary Freeman that day. After the formalities the royal party was entertained by the Mayor and Corporation at the Crown Inn *at their own individual expense*⁴.

A statue of the Duke of Sussex stood for many years in the middle of Theobald Square (now La Providence). The only statue to have ever been erected in Rochester it was removed much vandalised, in the 1950s. His older brother, William Henry, Duke of Clarence (later William IV) was admitted as an honorary Freeman on 24 July 1820 and was presented with a certificate of his freedom *fairly written on vellum and emblazoned with the City Arms and bordered by a wreath of oak*.⁵ Sailor Billy, as he was known, would also have been considered to be sympathetic to the Medway Towns. During several visits to the navy at Chatham he stayed at the Mitre Hotel (*Clarence* was added later) in Chatham High Street. He entered the Royal Navy as a midshipman in 1785 at the age of thirteen, served in North America and the Caribbean, and was present at the battle of Cape St Vincent.⁶ The Duke was captain of several ships, the last being the 74-gun *HMS Valiant* that was launched at Chatham on 10 August 1759.

In December 1836 Princess Victoria (later Queen) arrived at the Bull Hotel in Rochester High Street with her mother, the Duchess of Kent, on their return from a tour of the county. They had intended to change horses only. However, because of the intensity of the storm then raging, it was decided to stay overnight⁷. Subsequently *Royal Victoria* was added to the inn sign and a coat of arms was placed over the main entrance.

More conflict brought royal visits when in 1855 Queen Victoria and members of her family made three visits to the area. On 3 March the Queen came *for the purpose of evincing Royal sympathy and consideration for those brave and gallant men who are now suffering from the effects of the mighty war ...* On 5 March she wrote to Lord Panmure⁸:

The Queen is very anxious to bring before Lord Panmure the subject which she mentioned to him the other night, viz. That of Hospitals for our sick and wounded soldiers. This is absolutely necessary, and now is the moment to have them built, for no doubt there would be no difficulty in obtaining the money requisite for this purpose, from the strong feeling now existing in the public mind for improvements of all kinds connected with the Army and well-being and comfort of the soldier.

Nothing can exceed the attention of these poor men in the Barracks at Chatham) or rather more Fort Pitt and Brompton), they are in just that respect very comfortable; but the building are bad – the wards more like prisons than hospitals, with the windows so high that no one can look out of them; and the generality of the wards are small rooms, with hardly space to walk between the beds. There is no dining-room or hall, so that the poor men must have their dinners in the same room in which they sleep, and in which some may be dying, and any rate many suffering, while others ate their meals. The proposition of having hulks prepared for their reception will do very well at first, but it would not, the Queen thinks, do for any length of time. A hulk is a very gloomy place, and these poor men require their spirits to be cheered as much as their physical sufferings to be attended to. The Queen is particularly anxious on this subject, which is, she may truly say, constantly in her thoughts, as everything is connected to her beloved troops, who have fought so bravely and borne so heroically all their sufferings and privations.

She described an underground ward in one hospital as a *robber's den* and she also had *pity for the men who could bear pain so much less than us women.*⁹

From the 1880s many members of the royal family were in the Medway area when travelling to the continent. The South Eastern Railway promoted a railway line to be built through the Hoo Peninsula to carry passengers from London to the Isle of Grain. Port Victoria, as the station was called opened on 11 September 1882. Queen Victoria was a frequent traveller. It was reported that she *took a rather curious fancy to Grain as a departure point for trips to Germany.*¹⁰ The station closed in 1951.

On the 22 June 1896 Queen Victoria's second son, Prince Alfred, the Duke of Edinburgh and Saxe-Coburg and Gotha visited Chatham to present new colours to the Chatham Division of the Royal Marines at the Officer's Mess. The Prince served in the Royal Navy for over forty years and was Honorary Colonel of the Royal Marines.

A celebratory royal occasion took place at Chatham on 3 February 1898 when Queen Victoria's daughter, Princess Christian of Denmark, laid the foundation stone of the new Town Hall. The Princess travelled from London by special train on the London, Chatham and Dover Railway which on *this occasion being more than punctual* arrived one minute early. A Guard of Honour of one hundred men of the Royal Scots Guards, *with band and colours* was lined up in the yard of Chatham station, who together with a detachment of the West Kent (Queen's Own Yeoman Cavalry) formed the Royal escort. Chatham was *en fete* as described in a local newspaper¹¹:

The pageant on Wednesday was a brilliant affair, and was distinguished by the combination of the civil, clerical and service elements of the town, and the gracing of the whole by the presence of Royalty... with the cooperation of the naval and military we had a display that at once appealed to the eye and gave a demonstration of the important factors in the life of Chatham as a Dockyard and Garrison town. The red line along the streets, the brilliant guards of honour, the royal escort, the military bands... Captain Burgess and the members of the Chatham Fire Brigade whose helmets glistened like burnished gold as the rays of the sun every now and then fell upon them made up a picture which shone resplendent in the exceptionally bright, clear sunshine of a February day ...

The road between Chatham station and the Dockyard was lined with *gay and picturesque* decorations including Venetian masts with multi-coloured streamers and banners and a shield surmounted by five small flags halfway down the masts and loops of paper rosettes and evergreens strung across the roadway. After the official proceedings at the Town Hall site the Princess was presented with the silver trowel, ivory mallet and level to commemorate the occasion and the Princess and invited guests left for Government House. The procession passed under a *triumphal arch which spanned the roadway at the Gun Wharf*, where the drawbridge used to be. It was built:

From the multitudinous materials drawn from the art and craft of the Engineer. The skeleton of the arch was built on the same lines as a bridge would have been constructed for military purposes and the decoration were the ordinary tools and appliances which are used in their every day work... a rebutment was built of 1,800 sandbags and 50 railway sleepers... huge beams were supported on two piers, so that three arches were formed... The piers had at their base steel band gabions six feet high with submarine mine resting on the huge beams were carried over the thoroughfare top one on each corner on the ground. On the sides of the piers facing Chatham a submariner miner in his weird uniform sat like a piece of statuary on each of the upper mines. Suspended above were escalading ladders and various kinds of tools... and a side design of oars with lifebuoy in the middle. On the other side of the arch on a shield were a new helmet designed for exploring foul mines, and the pump for introducing fresh air. In the centre of the arch above the crossbeams a crow's nest was formed from which hung the flagstaff bearing the Royal Standard. Large shields with trenching and other tools formed the centre piece of the crow's nest on each side and underneath the mottoes God Save the Queen. Rows of gabions along the upper line of the arch gave to the whole a castellated look and the sight of two three-pounder quick-firing Hotchkiss guns added an air of modernity.

The arch was constructed by the 286th Squadron, under the supervision of Q.M.S Baker and flags hung by four of the naval signallers. After lunch the Princess attended the dedication of the new Victoria Tower of St Mary's Church, Chatham before being driven back to Chatham station where she departed at 4 o'clock.

Chapter 6: Twentieth Century

The beginning of the new century once again brought royal visitors to the area. On 26 July 1905 King Edward VII attended two opening ceremonies locally. As Colonel-in-Chief of the Royal Engineers he unveiled a War Memorial at the Royal Engineers' Barracks, Brompton dedicated to the Royal Engineer Units that had served in the South African War 1899 – 1902.

The King, accompanied by Queen Alexandra, moved on to the newly-built Royal Naval Hospital, Windmill Road, Gillingham which he opened with a golden key.¹ The hospital, built to replace Melville Hospital at Brompton (subsequently the Royal Marines hospital) was designed by Mr J.T.C. Murray and built under the supervision of Sir Henry Pilkington. It covered an area of thirty-nine acres and cost £800,000.

In 1918, World War One casualties in the Hospital were visited by King George V and Queen Mary. Accompanied by two of their children, Prince George and Princess Mary, they toured eleven wards where they stopped to talk to many of the sick and wounded. One man from the *Iris*, James L Cowgill, was asked by the King what the action at the Zeebrugge raid had been like. He replied that *it was very, very bad sir but it was well worth it.*

King George V was also one of the first members of the Royal Family to visit the Women's Royal Naval Service at Chatham. The King inspected members of the W.R.N.S. who were drawn up on parade in Dock Road as he walked from the Dockyard to The Royal Marine Barracks.

In July 1922 the Prince of Wales (later King Edward VIII) unveiled the Naval War Memorial on the Great Lines. It has a rectangular column of Portland stone about one hundred feet high, rising from a base surmounted by buttresses and crowned with a large copper sphere supported by emblematic figures representing the four winds. Immediately below these figures are four prows of ships carved in stone. On the base and buttresses are bronze panels bearing the names of those members of the Royal Navy, the Royal Air Force, the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, the Royal Naval Reserve, the Mercantile Marine Reserve and civilians of the Chatham Command who fell in the Great War of 1914 to 1918².

Later that year Princess Marie Louise, a grand-daughter of Queen Victoria, was in the area. A member of the Royal Red Cross, she took a particular interest in the nursing service. She was also active in the work of her mother's foundation, the Princess Christian Nursing Home at Windsor. On the morning of 23 November 1922 she arrived in Gillingham to open the new naval maternity nursing home for pregnant wives of local servicemen. The Princess named the home Canada House in recognition of the financial assistance provided by the dominion.

Canada House was designed by Mr C.W. Thompson of Rochester and built by Messrs. Skinner and Sons of Chatham. Princess Marie Louise opened the door with a silver-gilt key, enamelled with the Naval Crown, Globe and Laurel, the Royal Arms and the Imperial Crown, the work of Messrs. Croneen of Gillingham. After a tour of the building the Princess was presented with the key in an oak casket made at the Naval Barracks.

Princess Marie Louise returned to the Medway towns in 1935 when she made a visit to the Dean of Rochester, Dr. Francis Underhill. The Dean and Mrs Underhill hosted an informal garden party at the Deanery where a representative company of people from the Medway Towns were presented to the Princess. While at the Deanery, Princess Marie Louise also signed the ancient *Customal which* contains the names of many illustrious and distinguished visitors.

On 29 June 1927 Prince Arthur of Connaught, a grandson of Queen Victoria, and his wife (Princess Alexandra, Duchess of Fife) made an official visit to Rochester. The programme for the day included

the official opening of the Foord's Almshouses, lunch in the Guildhall, a visit to St Bartholomew's Hospital and the opening of the Fair, in aid of the hospital, in Rochester Castle Gardens.³

After a reception and speeches at the Guildhall the royal party moved on to the newly built Foord's almshouses in Priestfields which were financed from a bequest in the will of Thomas Hellyar Foord who had died in 1917. After being introduced to trustees and staff, the Prince and Princess crossed the quadrangle to the central hall where the official opening was performed by the Prince. Following a tour of the buildings with the architect, Mr E. Guy Dawber, the royal party left for lunch at the Guildhall.

After lunch the Prince and Princess visited St Bartholomew's Hospital where they toured the wards (Mark, Spong and Watts) and the operating theatre, and were presented to various dignitaries and staff. The royal party were then given a tour of the hospital including the new extension, where they were accompanied by the Architect Mr Herbert Reed and Mr T.N. McDermott, Consulting Engineer.

The opening of the Fair by the Princess, in the Castle Gardens in aid of the Hospital, was delayed for a while by torrential rain. Twenty minutes late, the official ceremony took place *on a platform near the sundial, with the grey walls of the ancient castle towering above the verdant trees and shrubs forming a picturesque background.* After the speeches the Princess was presented with a bouquet of roses by Joan Treacher, daughter of the Rev. H. Treacher, and the royal visitors were given a tour of the fair than began with the show provided by Councillor and Mrs G. Tyrwhitt Drake of Maidstone and *Nero* their celebrated lion.

A great celebration of the ancient history and modern industry and trade of Rochester brought Prince George (later Duke of Kent) to Rochester in 1931. The Civic Week took place between 22 and 27 June. Each day had a different designation⁴ and official visitors:

- Monday – Royal Day – Official opening of the week by Prince George (Duke of Kent);
- Tuesday – Civic Day – Lord Mayor of London with Sheriffs and Mayors from three counties
- Wednesday – Clergy Day – Bishop of Rochester
- Thursday – Industrial Day – Sir Herbert Austin and other prominent industrialists
- Friday – Aviation Day – Col. F.C. Shermadine, Director of Civil Aviation
- Saturday – Dickens Day – Sir Henry Fielding Dickens

The official programme listed displays and entertainments, a Fancy Dress Ball, a competition for the best window display and *all citizens* were requested to give the Duke *a royal and enthusiastic welcome.*

From Monday to Friday a Historical Pageant took place in the Castle Gardens relating the history of Rochester since Roman times. The Prologue which illustrated *allegorically, the function and nature of the Pageant* as told by Fame, who crowned the Spirit of Rochester, Clio the muse of history, Elves, Hours etc.. The Spirit of Rochester was played by three different people: Miss Betty Wheatley, Miss K. Walter and Miss Sybil Thorndike.

Episode Eight related *Dickens' Last Vision of Rochester*, a collection of scenes of Rochester from Dickens' novels, and was followed by the Epilogue, a procession of all the pageant characters and *Representatives of Modern Industries.*

Prince George was in the Medway area again in 1933. On 26 July, on behalf of the Prince of Wales, President of the Shaftesbury Homes, the Duke officially inaugurated the *Training Ship Arethusa* as the new home for the training of boys in the Royal Navy and Merchant Service. Built in 1911 when it was named the *Peking* the ship was sold to the Shaftesbury Homes for £6,250. The name of the

vessel later reverted to *Peking*. Arethusa was a nymph in Greek mythology who became the lover of a river god.

The previous *Arethusa* served in the Crimea where she sustained considerable damage at the Battles of Sebastopol and Odessa, after which she was repaired at Malta. In May 1874 she was taken to Greenhithe to be used as a training ship for homeless and destitute boys with an average age of 14 to be trained in seamanship. Replaced by the *Peking*, it was broken up in 1934 and its water nymph figurehead taken to Upnor and placed on the seafront opposite the ship.

Two years later the Duke was back again. He had accepted an invitation from Dean Underhill to be the first Patron of the newly formed Friends of Rochester Cathedral and was at the cathedral for the Friends' inaugural service that was held on 2 November 1935.⁵

The Duke's widow, Princess Marina, Duchess of Kent made many visits to the Medway area. On 9 October 1945 she visited the W.R.N.S at Chatham. Twelve years later, having succeeded her husband as Patron of the Friends of Rochester Cathedral, the Princess was present at the annual Friends Festival Day. In 1959 she was back with the Royal Navy at Chatham when she launched H.M Submarine Oberon. Following the launch she flew by helicopter to Rochester, where she landed in the King's School playing field and was escorted to Rochester Cathedral for the Friends' Festival Service and an inspection of the restoration work.

The last visit of Princess Marina was again at the cathedral, for the Friends Festival Day in 1968, a few weeks before she died.

In 1939 King George VI and Queen Elizabeth visited Shorts Aircraft Works at Rochester. They were given a tour of the factory by Oswald Short where they met many of the workforce and inspected the interior of the Empire Flying Boat *Australia*.⁶

On 16 April 1942 they were at Chatham Dockyard to meet the workers, sailors and Royal Marines. In May 1948 the King returned to Chatham, as Admiral of the Fleet, when he visited the Royal Naval Barracks at H.M.S Pembroke.⁷ The groups inspected by the King included the Sea Cadets ranging in age from nine to thirteen years and the Royal Marine Cadets.

Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother returned to Rochester on 18 May 1954 for the celebrations of the 27th Jubilee of Diocese of Rochester. Her Majesty was served coffee with Bishop Chevasse at Bishopscourt followed by a Civic Lunch at the Guildhall where she was welcomed by the Mayor, Alderman Skipper and other dignitaries. After lunch the Queen attended a service in the cathedral. The lunch menu comprised:⁸

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

Thirty years later the Queen Mother returned to spend a day in the Medway area.⁹ In the morning she was at Upnor, where she toured the Arethusa Venture Centre and the Training Ship Arethusa, both of

which were run by the Shaftesbury Homes, of which she was Patron. After lunch the Queen Mother was driven to the Rochester/Chatham border where she opened the refurbished Sir John Hawkins Hospital and was given tea by one of the residents. The hospital was built to provide for *ancient and decayed sailors and shipwrights* but following refurbishment also provides accommodation for their dependants.

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

Queen Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh made an informal visit to the Oil Refinery at Grain on the morning of 5 August 1955.¹⁰ They were cheered by crowds of employees (who had been given the day off) and their families as the royal couple toured the main parts of the refinery. 3,000 flags were provided for the children to wave. In the afternoon Prince Philip opened the new technical college at Fort Horsted. He arrived by helicopter to a crowd of 4,000 cheering spectators and a welcome by Mr Knell, Chairman of the College Governors. In his speech the Prince spoke of the need for a good technical education in the present times where every aspect of life was influenced by science and technology. He finished with *as this thing is so badly needed I will waste no more time in declaring the college open*, cut a ribbon across the entrance to the college with a pair of gold plated scissors and was given a tour of the building.

On 31 March 1961, The Queen and Prince Philip were in Rochester as part of the celebrations commemorating 500 years of the Mayoral Charter granted by King Edward IV. In the morning they arrived at the Guildhall where various dignitaries were presented to the Queen. Following coffee the royal visitors were invited to inspect the city charters and sign the Visitors Book¹¹ before processing to the Cathedral for Maundy service where the Queen presented the purses to 35 elderly men and women. Sherry served at the Deanery was followed by a lunch at the Corn Exchange, the menu being:

Turtle Soup or Smoked Salmon
Roast ribs of English Beef
Yorkshire pudding
New Potatoes Garden Peas
Brussels Sprouts
Rochester Flan¹²
Petit fours and coffee

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

On 21 October 1984 the Queen and Prince Philip made a whistle stop tour of the Medway Towns.¹³ Their first stop was the Molly Wisdom hospice in St William's Way, Rochester where the Queen unveiled a plaque. The royal party moved on to the Corn Exchange in Rochester High Street where the Queen and Prince Philip signed the Customal before sitting down to 'a banquet'. Lunch was followed by a walkabout in the High Street where the Queen unveiled a plaque on Chertsey's Gate commemorating the refurbishment of the High Street. They left Rochester for a short stop at the Captain's House in the Dockyard where the Queen and the Prince were shown a model of the proposed development of St Mary's Island. The day finished at Gillingham Business Park where they were given a tour of the Jubilee Clip Factory and a skating display at the Ice Bowl.

The Queen, as Colonel-in-Chief of the Royal Engineers, has made several visits to their barracks at Brompton. On 28 March 1968, the Queen inspected the new installations at the Royal School of Military Engineering. In 1987 she opened the Royal Engineers Museum that had recently been

transferred from Brompton Barracks to the Ravelin Building in King Arthur Road, Gillingham. Twenty years later the Queen returned. After an inspection of the troops she was given a crab and chicken lunch before posing for a photograph with the commanding officers.

Prince Philip in December 1977 visited workers at Chatham Dockyard where he was assured that there was no truth in the rumour that the dockyard would be closed. He was back with the Royal Navy on 15 October 1952 when he unveiled an addition to the Naval Memorial on the Great Lines. The extension forms a semicircular outer wall that holds fifty bronze plaques recording the names of the 10,112 who died in World War II. The memorial was designed by Edward Maufe and sculpted by Charles Wheeler.¹⁴

Princess Margaret, Countess Snowdon opened the new road bridge, at Rochester on 15 April 1970 followed by lunch *for honoured guests* in the Boardroom of the Bridge Chamber¹⁵ The new bridge was built by A.E. Farr Limited on the foundations of the old London, Chatham & Dover Railway Bridge that had opened in 1858.

Princess Alexandra spent a busy day in Rochester on 11 May 1978 for the commemoration of the 900th anniversary of the founding of St Bartholomew's Hospital in Rochester.¹⁶ The Princess's programme for the day included the official opening of an addition to the accommodation (eleven new bungalows) at Watts Almshouses where she met trustees, residents and members of staff. St. Bartholomew's Hospital was built and subsequently financed to a large extent by contributions from Watts Charity.

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

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

The Duke of Kent was in Rochester on 27 June 1994 at the opening of the refurbished Guildhall Museum and at Upnor to open the climbing wall at the Arethusa Venture Centre. The refurbishment of the museum cost £837,000 and within six months had boosted visitor figures by 70 per cent. The Duke unveiled a plaque commemorating the visit, received a bronze cast of the medieval city seal and signed the visitors' book. Accompanied by the Lord Lieutenant and the Mayor, Mrs Ann Marsh, he was given a tour of the museum by the Curator Michael Moad, during which the Duke remarked on the heaviness of the mayoral chains.¹⁷ In the afternoon the Duke's party visited Upnor Venture Centre where they saw a group of young assailers, including some from the Kent Disabled Club in wheelchairs, scale the 23-foot wall. The Duke however scaled the wall in a lift. At the top he unveiled a plaque but not before a climber had retrieved the forgotten scissors from the ground, in order for him to cut the tape and declare the wall open.¹⁸

Chapter 7: Twenty-First Century

The Earl and Countess of Wessex visited the Molly Wisdom Hospice in Rochester in May 2004¹ where they toured the new Day Care Centre. At a cost of £1.3 million pounds the centre includes a hairdressing salon where patients are offered free sessions. The royal visitors met patients and volunteers including Judith Bradbury, who was accompanied by her West Highland terrier, Daisy. Daisy, who is part of the National Dogs scheme that takes the therapeutic benefits of making a fuss of a dog to patients, was more interested in the freesias in the Countess' bouquet. Before the royal couple left they were presented with a framed photograph decorated by day care patients.

Two years later the Countess unveiled a plaque at the Cerebral Palsy Care Unit at Cliffe Woods. On 21 March 2006 the Duke of Kent was welcomed to the cathedral on the occasion of the Lord Lieutenant's Civic Service for the County of Kent.

The Prince of Wales has visited the area on several occasions. On 10 November 2004 he was at Rochester Cathedral where he attended the evening service of thanksgiving for Justus, Pilgrim, Missionary and Bishop.² He returned to the cathedral on 20 March 2007 for the performance of the Jools Holland Mass in aid of the Music Forever Campaign.³ On 9 June 2009 the Prince of Wales, as patron of the Royal Naval Benevolent Trust, visited Pembroke House, Gillingham where he met members of staff, trustees and residents. Pembroke House provides residential and nursing care to former Royal Marines, sailors, their wives and widows.⁴

On 14 November 2007 Prince Philip unveiled his second naval monument in the area. The monument stands in Chatham Dockyard next to the restored *HMS Cavalier* and together they form a memorial to the 142 Royal Navy destroyers sunk during World War II and the over 11,000 men who died. The monument, a bronze bas-relief depicting a destroyer rescuing men from a sinking ship, was created by sculptor Kenneth Potts.⁵

On 23 March 2006 the Princess Royal was at Summit House, Woodlands Road Gillingham to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Duke of Edinburgh Awards.⁶ After being greeted by Alison Tapley, a seventeen-year-old working towards her Gold Award, the Princess toured the centre where she watched displays of cookery, fencing, photography and belly dancing. After a slight hiccup the blue velvet curtain opened to reveal a gold plaque commemorating the occasion. Before leaving the Princess watched a Knockout contest between pupils from local secondary schools.

Four years later the Princess returned to Gillingham. On 25 March 2010 she opened the new Mid Kent College in Prince Arthur Road that replaced the buildings at Horsted and City Way, Rochester. During her tour of the campus the Princess saw photographs of her father opening the new Mid Kent College at Fort Horsted in 1955.⁷

On 28 October the same year the Duchess of Cornwall visited the Medway Aircraft Preservation Society's base at Rochester Airport to see member's work in the reconstruction of vintage aircraft. She subsequently became Patron of this organisation.

The Princess Royal was the latest royal visitor to the Medway area when in July 2011 she opened Medway Park and unveiled a commemorative plaque to mark the £11 million

transformation of the Black Lion Sports Centre. The dust having settled for 2012, the Diamond Jubilee year, we will roll up the red carpet and stow it away until the next royal visitor appears.

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