

The Issac Newell Heritage Group

The Isaac Newell Heritage Group (INHG) was formed in late 2023 and met for its inaugural meeting on 6 December 2023 at the Medway Archives Centre (MAC). Group members share an interest in perpetuating the memory of Strood-born Isaac Newell (1853-1907), and with the prime aim to erect a statue of him on the Strood waterfront.

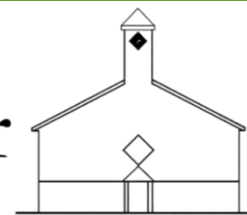
At the end of January, Adrian Pope and Amanda Thomas spent a day supporting Kent University student Oliver Small and his colleague Cecilia Kang. Oliver had contacted Adrian about making a documentary film on the life of Isaac Newell, as part of his course work, and which might also later be uploaded to YouTube. But why is *Clock Tower* Editor, Amanda Thomas standing outside 5 High Street, Strood? Find out on pages 12 – 15.



Photograph by Adrian Pope.

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

The Clock Tower



Issue Number 73: February 2024
£2.00; free to members

The Friends of Medway Archives
Excepted Charity registration number XR92894

Meet Sarah and Poppy!



The Medway Archives Centre new archivist, Sarah Trim-West and her hearing dog Poppy. MAC is once again fully staffed!
Helen Worthy, our newly appointed Manager, gives an overview on page 6.

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The Isaac Newell Heritage Group. See page 12.

The Isaac Newell Heritage Group

On the suggestion of FOMA Member, Sandra Fowler, the Isaac Newell Heritage Group (INHG) was formed in late 2023 and met for its inaugural meeting on 6 December 2023 at the Medway Archives Centre (MAC). The aim of the group is to perpetuate the memory of one of Strood's greatest sons - Isaac Newell (1853-1907) - and (amongst other things) to erect a statue of him on the Strood waterfront. More on page 12.



Left: a bust of Isaac Newell resting on a Newell's Old Boys shirt. Photograph by Nikki Pratt.

Right: The Newell's Old Boys commemorative tea towel – now being produced in Medway by Medwayish. It can be purchased at

<https://www.medwayish.com/product/isaac-newell-tea-towel>

Photograph by Sandra Fowler.



Chatham Town fans Gary Barrell and Kevin Younger. Kevin is holding the bust of Isaac Newell that we are thrilled to report will be displayed in the CTFC display case. Further news can be found on page 12.

Photograph by Adrian Pope

FOMA Vice Chairman – and member of the Isaac Newell Heritage Group - Rob Flood joined Adrian Pope at Chatham Town Football Club (CTFC) on Saturday 10 February. Adrian and Rob were guests of CTFC General Manager, Gaz Hake. Adrian was approached by Gaz (who had read the story of Isaac Newell) and CTFC is interested in helping disseminate the story locally. Pictured are (left to right): Rob Flood and

Commemorating the Closure of Chatham Dockyard

There has probably always been a dockyard of some sort at Chatham, given its strategic location, but it rose to national importance in the sixteenth century when the Tudor dockyard (situated closer to the town centre) began building ships. The first was probably the *Merlyon*, or *Merlin*, which fought in the Spanish Armada, but perhaps the most famous was HMS *Victory* which was launched in 1765.

Chatham was the dockyard, and it was with tremendous sadness that it closed in 1984. On page 17, in the first part of her article, *Forty Years On. Chatham and its Dockyard: Regeneration, Repurposing and Renewal*, Norma Crowe tells the story of Chatham's Royal Naval Dockyard.

The expansion of the Dockyard from the mid-nineteenth century caused the Medway towns to grow rapidly and Chatham to merge with Luton village. On page 22, Brian Joyce tells the story of Horace Shirley, his memories of a lost medieval village and urbanisation.

A Chatham Boy Joins the Royal Navy – in 1803!

On page 28 Peter Burse begins a three-part series on the life of his ancestor, John Grant (c1790-1863), who was born and lived in Chatham for most of his life. He spent 25 years serving in the Royal Navy and survived the wrecking of HMS *Venerable* (below).



Lieutenant Samuel Walters' drawing of the wreck of the *Venerable* in 1804. Courtesy of National Museums Liverpool, Merseyside Maritime Museum Archives, Accession no. DX/1146.

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The Clock Tower Editor and Publicist

Amanda Thomas

editor@foma-lsc.org

Chairman's Letter

Elaine Gardner



Hello and welcome to the first *Clock Tower* of 2024! It is probably too late for New Year greetings, but I hope your year has begun well.

It was really good to be able to meet MAC's new Archivist, Sarah Trim-West at our January committee meeting along with her beautiful hearing dog Poppy who definitely steals the show! Now that the Medway Archives Centre (MAC) is fully staffed, they will be able to offer members of the public the service that they would like to, rather than have to limit their time. On page 6 you can read newly appointed Manager, Helen Worthy's guide to who's who at MAC.

Events for 2024 are already building up. MAC has their first exhibition -*Homeward Bound* – a history of some of Medway's historic ships until 13 April which ties in with two of the MAC talks in the 2024 Lecture Series (see page 41 for further details). Stuart Bligh spoke about The Battle of Trafalgar on 14 February and Rebecca Clarke's talk on 8 May is entitled, *HMS India*. Our Editor, Amanda Thomas always forwards Helen Worthy's Archive information leaflet to members, so if you don't want to miss events make sure you note them down when the information arrives!

Other talks in the series include Amanda's talk, *The Real Oliver Twist: The Story of Charles Dickens and the Infant Pauper Asylum at Tooting*, Geoff Ettridge's *A Meander along Rochester High Street*, Brian Joyce's *Railway Street, Chatham* – which used to be called Rome Lane – and last of all, Catharina Clement's *The Lost Village of Gillingham* on 3 July. The talks have been moved to Wednesday afternoons, when the archive is normally closed so that they can take place in the lobby, rather than the hall as the acoustics are better. Do make sure you book in advance, as the talks are popular, and you may find all seats are gone.

We also have our first FOMA talk in March, and we are planning a quiz night to raise funds for MAC, though finding a date that doesn't clash with those of other societies is proving difficult. Hopefully it will be in April so please do get a team together or come along and make up a team with others. Also don't forget our AGM on 12 April; details are on page 40 or the FOMA website, Facebook page and Instagram.

This year, it is 40 years since the closure of Chatham Dockyard, and on page 17 we start a two-part series by Norma Crowe to commemorate the event. In addition, it is 200 years since the birth of Thomas Aveling (1824-1882) who lived and is buried in Hoo.

Aveling provided many jobs in the Medway Towns as a steamroller manufacturer and producer of agricultural engines and machinery. Together with Richard Thomas Porter, their Strood factory Aveling and Porter was famous throughout the world. Even today, at any steam rally you may go to you are bound to see the white Invicta symbol on the front of at least one vehicle. What a shame there is nothing left in Strood now to commemorate him – what an asset that would be to Strood’s tourism industry. Perhaps we need another campaign!

Finally, and in a very similar vein, on page 12 Amanda Thomas reports on the inaugural meeting of the Isaac Newell Heritage Group at MAC. Readers will recall that Adrian Pope has been campaigning for some 20 years to have a stature erected of Isaac, and many of us felt we needed to join forces to make that happen. Born in Strood in 1853, Isaac was an extraordinary visionary who took the modern football game to Argentina. and started one of the most famous football clubs in the world, Newell’s Old Boys. His story is inspirational and it is astonishing how many fans travel to Strood each year to pay homage to his legacy. Medway tourism is most definitely missing out – but as usual we are at the forefront, doing our best to share our amazing heritage with everyone!

New Members

A warm welcome to new FOMA members David Chalder, Len Dormon, Sylvia Herbert, Ralph Allison, Derek Chandler.

Christopher Featherstone

It is with great sadness that we report the death of Christopher Featherstone.

In *The Clock Tower*, Issue 69, February 23, George Atzev reported on the restoration of Chatham House, once the home of a Featherstone’s shop. He and Natasha Boardman-Steer ‘were commissioned by Medway Council to deliver a heritage engagement and reminiscence project about Featherstones’ presence at Chatham House ... entitled *Featherstones’ Memories*, focussed on historical images from the Medway Archives Centre to inspire conversations about Featherstones’ and trigger memories for people who may have worked or shopped at Chatham House. ... As part of the project, we were also very fortunate to produce an oral history film with Christopher Featherstone, the grandson of the retail chain’s founder John Featherstone. In the hour-long interview, Christopher spoke fondly of his memories and experiences of working at Chatham House and in the wider family-run business.

About The Clock Tower

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

Editorial deadlines

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

The copy deadline for Issue 74 of *The Clock Tower* is Monday 29 April 2024, with publication on Wednesday 22 May 2024.

Publication date

The fourth Wednesday following the editorial deadline.

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

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Front Cover Accreditations and Website Information

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

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

The Clock Tower is also available at www.foma-lsc.org/journal.php

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

Further Information

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

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

Membership enquiries should be directed to the Membership Secretary, Jean Skilling, 15 Port Close, Lordswood, Chatham, ME5 8DU, Kent; membership@foma-lsc.org

FoCT_Accounts_Legal+_Admin_2023.pdf (chathamtraction.org.uk)
Chair_Report_for_2023.pdf (chathamtraction.org.uk)

The latest updates are available here:

https://www.chathamtraction.org.uk/updates/231007_Update_63.pdf
https://www.chathamtraction.org.uk/updates/Connecting_Service_15.pdf

For more information see the website at www.chathamtraction.org.uk or contact Richard Bourne (Chairman); 31 Usher Park Road, Haxby, York YO32 3RX; 01904 766375, or 07771 831653. Email Richard@thebournes.me.uk.

Friends of Broomhill

The Friends of Broomhill, Strood, Task Days are the first **Sunday** of every month (except January), from September to April inclusive, 10 am to noon. **Thursday** Task Days are every Thursday morning (all year) concentrating on the Old Orchard woodland, 10 am to noon. Meet in car park at end of King Arthurs Drive, Strood, ME2 3NB. All welcome, no experience necessary, tools provided or bring your own. It's fun, free and healthy!



For further details see our car park notice boards or visit our website: www.friendsofbroomhill.org.uk. You can also find us on social media (Facebook, Instagram and Twitter) or contact David Park, Secretary on 07968-380588 or email: secretary@friendsofbroomhill.org.uk

Medway Geographical and Local History Society

Our forthcoming presentations are as follows:

Friday 22 March

Conservation with the Big Apes – a talk by Alison Bristop.

Friday 26 April

Mary Barton: Fair Maid of Kent, 1506/1534 – a talk by Melanie Gibson-Barton.

Friday 24 May

AGM.

Meetings at 2.00/3.30pm. Doors open 1.30pm. Holy Trinity Church, Twydall Lane, Gillingham, Kent ME8 6JU. Visitors £3.50 per meeting. Annual subscription £20. Two subjects for the price of one! All welcome.

For further information contact Vanda Woollett. Tel.01634 389916, mobile 0794

8277 131. email vandawoollett63@gmail.com

Our hour-long interview, which can be found at Medway Archives Centre, enabled the production of a shorter, 14-minute film that was shared via YouTube and social media, reaching over 6,800 people who were very pleased to see and hear from Christopher, who they remembered from Featherstones.'



Christopher Featherstone, grandson of John Featherstone, during the filmed oral history interview.

The Friends of Medway Archives

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Friday, 12 April 2022, 7.00 for 7.30 pm;

St Nicholas Church Lower Hall,
Strood, Rochester, Kent, ME2 4TR.

Details/paperwork will be available online on the FOMA website,
www.foma-lsc.org.

If you require paper copies, please contact the FOMA Chairman: Elaine Gardner,
102 Valley View Road, Rochester, ME1 3NX, Kent; emgardner@virginmedia.com;
01634 408595.

Apologies to the Secretary, Christopher de Coulon Berthoud,
4 Albert Road, Rochester, ME1 3DG, Kent.
berthoud@blueyonder.co.uk

Medway Archives Centre Report

Helen Worthy, Medway Archives Centre Manager



Hello everyone! We have had a busy time at Medway Archives Centre since our last update. The following is just a brief overview, so please do get in touch if you'd like to know more about the collections at Medway Archives Centre, our events and exhibitions, or about the services we offer.

Staffing



We are pleased to welcome our new Archivist, Sarah Trim-West and her hearing dog Poppy, to Medway Archives Centre. Sarah comes to us from Brunel University London and is excited to embark on a new adventure in Medway.

We now have a full complement of staff. As you may not have met everyone yet, we thought it was a good time to introduce you to the team members! You will see that we have diverse interests, knowledge and skills, which we feel is one of our strengths, and everyone has a role in providing customer service and caring for the collections. We are all involved in exhibitions and events, as well as researching the many and varied aspects of Medway's history, people and places. We also contribute to local arts and community projects, and help our council colleagues with interpretation boards, tree preservation orders, naming new streets in Medway, and much more.

And did you know that as well as providing face-to-face support, during 2023 we also replied to almost 900 enquiries by email, phone and via our Facebook page? Every day we receive enquiries from customers all over the world, as well as from local people and our colleagues in other council departments.

Opening Hours and Visiting

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

An appointment must be made to view original archive material and use microfilm or fiche readers.

How to Make an Appointment

Email us at malsc@medway.gov.uk to make an appointment and to discuss which items you wish to consult. For original archive material you must give at least three working days' notice of your intention to visit. For all other material (such as books, maps, photographs) we just require one working day's notice. When you book we will ask for your name and contact details so that we can keep in touch with you about your appointment.

- You can also search or browse for original archive material on the [Medway Council Heritage Services catalogue](#).
- You can find books and periodicals by searching the [Medway Libraries online catalogue](#).
- If you cannot find what you are looking for, please contact us.



NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Saturday 2 March 2024

13.30 for 14.00 to 16.30

The Huguenot Museum (within Tourist Information Centre)
95 High Street Rochester ME1 1LX.

The agenda and reports can be found by following these links, or by going on the website (see below and overleaf):

Chatham Traction 50/75

Meeting to discuss restoration of former Chatham & District Bristol/Weymann vehicle GKE 68 (chathamtraction.org.uk)

FoCT_FINAL_ACCOUNTS_2023.pdf (chathamtraction.org.uk)

Brian Joyce: Railway Street, Chatham

Wednesday 12 June 2024,
2pm to 3.30pm

In his talk, Brian will examine the history of Railway Street (formerly named Rome Lane) in Chatham. He will begin at the railway station, and finish at Railway Street's junction with the High Street and Military Road. On the way, Brian will look at the station itself, the New Road viaduct, the now-demolished Rome House, St John's Church and various businesses that were once found on the street.



Catharina Clement: The Lost Village of Gillingham

Wednesday 3 July 2024,
2pm to 3.30pm

Today we think of Gillingham as a large urban area, but it was not always so. Until incorporation in 1903 it was a thriving village in its own right, centred around the parish church of St Mary Magdalene. Sadly, very little of it survives today. Come and discover the illustrated history of the original village.



Sarah Trim-West – Archivist

As Archivist at Medway Archives Centre, Sarah is responsible for our strategic planning, and has ultimate responsibility for the development and care of our fantastic archive collections. As manager of the MAC Librarian and MAC Manager, she ensures the delivery of our mission statement and the ongoing commitment to retain our TNA (The National Archives) Accreditation. She is currently concentrating on tackling the cataloguing backlog and ensuring a smooth migration to an updated version of our online catalogue.

Emma Ovenden– Medway Archives Centre Librarian

As MAC's Librarian, Emma oversees the care and development of the published books, maps, photographs and ephemera collections. With particular responsibility for our special collections you'll soon find out when chatting to her that she is passionate about anything related to the Short Brothers! Emma also plans and leads our events and outreach programmes, developing partnerships and reaching out to diverse audiences.



Helen Worthy– Medway Archives Centre Manager

Helen has responsibility for the operational aspect of running Medway Archives Centre, and ensures the service runs smoothly. As well as managing our enquiries, archive retrievals and bookings, she also has managerial responsibility for the Archive Assistants, Saturday Assistant and apprentices. She is also responsible for managing our wonderful team of remote and on-site volunteers, and for developing volunteer projects.

Our Archives Assistants are often the first people you meet when you arrive at MAC. As well as providing customer service, and answering remote enquiries, all our assistants help prepare and staff our events, and provide access to our resources.

Nikki Pratt– Archives Assistant

Nikki plays a key role in checking our pest traps and managing our environmental monitors. She creates archival polyester sleeves for our photographs, ephemera and archive documents, which is important for the preservation of our collections, and helps with some conservation tasks.

Alison Thomas– Archives Assistant

As well as creating most of our eye-catching posters, Alison plays a crucial role in promoting our many exhibitions and events. She is also cataloguing our parish registers and is working on a brief history of Medway Council and the predecessor councils. She is also creating a database of Medway Artists together with brief biographies and useful resources held at MAC.





Cat Clement – Archives Assistant

Cat manages our extensive ephemera collection and is also responsible for developing and managing our new book sales stock. She also plays a leading role in preparing our Saturday drop-in events and has developed our popular family and children’s history trails. You will also see Cat volunteering at our events, and she will appear as a lecturer at our MAC Lecture Series this year.

Eleanor - Archives Assistant

As well as creating social media posts for our popular Facebook page, Eleanor works closely with our extensive collection of Chatham building plans and is creating a database of George Bond plans for researchers and staff. She also supports Emma with planning and delivering children’s outreach and activities.

Chris de Coulon-Berthoud- Saturday Archives Assistant

Chris has been creating databases of postwar popular culture including gigs, bands and musicians and the various venues, folk clubs and pubs where performances took place. This work also involved listing the Chris Broderick Collection (see *The Clock Tower*, Issue 70, May 2023; p. 7).



Collections Care Fortnight

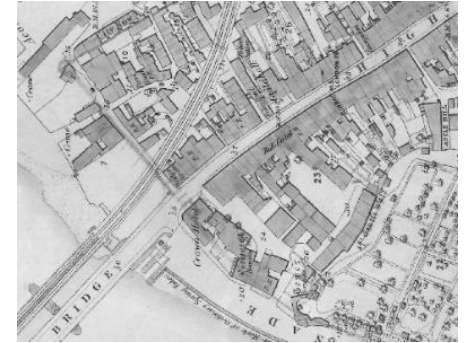
We thought you might like to know what was going on behind the scenes here at Medway Archives Centre during our Collections Care Fortnight. This temporary closure enables us to work on tasks that cannot take place whilst we are open to the public. All staff play a part in the conservation, care and security of our collections. The team has been cleaning our extensive book collections in the searchroom. This important process ensures our books remain free from pests and dirt, as well as enabling us to identify books which need further conservation. Books are then also audited and the storage checked to ensure the area is clean and dry. This task means books are well-cared for and ensures their long-term survival.

Did you know that new documents arriving at Medway Archives Centre are stored for a period of time in our quarantine room? This ensures that pests, mould and dirt are not introduced into the main collections. We have also been processing collections that are ready to move into the strongroom and creating space in readiness for new arrivals.

Geoff Ettridge: A Meander along Rochester High Street

Wednesday 13 March 2024,
2pm to 3.30pm.

For over 10 years Geoff has used tours and rambles to tell something of our past - and to raise money for good causes. Rather like pop groups bringing out an album of their greatest hits, Geoff will draw from his various tours to make connections between places along the high street, and our local and national past.



Amanda Thomas: The Real Oliver Twist: The Story of Charles Dickens and the Infant Pauper Asylum at Tooting

Wednesday 10 April 2024,
2pm to 3.30pm

On 20 January 1849 a moving article was published in the weekly journal, *The Examiner*. Entitled, 'The Paradise at Tooting', its author, Charles Dickens, gave a damning account of the running of the Infant Pauper Asylum at Tooting, south-west London. In this talk, author and historian, Amanda Thomas, will explain what went on at Tooting, and how Dickens helped bring the scandal to the public's attention.

Rebecca Clarke: HMS India

Wednesday 8 May 2024,
2pm to 3.30pm

Discover more about the history of P&O cruiser turned First World War Royal Navy ship HMS India. The talk includes dramatic retellings of the torpedo attack with accounts given by crew from both HMS India and the U-boat. Survivors from the attack were interned in Norway for over three years, and one of them was Rebecca's grandfather-in-law, RA Clarke. Rebecca uses excerpts from RA Clarke's letters, along with reflections from other internees, to bring the experience of the camp alive and tell their stories.



News and Events

Calendar of Forthcoming Events and Exhibitions

FOMA Talks and Events

Friday 8 March 2024, 7.30 pm

Rochester Bridge in Times of Modern Conflict

A talk by Ray Harris, Assistant Warden at the Rochester Bridge Trust

The talk coincides with the exhibition at the Bridge Trust which re-opens in March and runs until May 2024

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Friday, 12 April 2022, 7.00 for 7.30 pm;

St Nicholas Church Lower Hall,

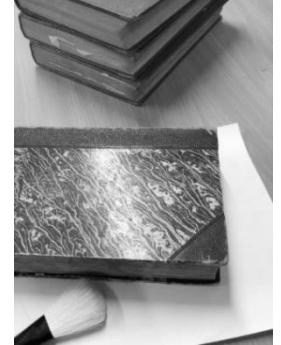
Strood, Rochester, Kent, ME2 4TR.

Booking for FOMA events is not necessary and unless specified are ALL held at St Nicholas Church Lower Hall, Strood, Rochester, Kent. ME2 4TR; car park entrance is off Gun Lane, ME2 4UG, almost opposite the Health Centre. Please check our website (www.foma-lsc.org) for further information and for other forthcoming events. Talks are £3 for members, £5 non-members. Booking for Quiz Nights and enquiries through the FOMA Chairman: Elaine Gardner, 102 Valley View Road, Rochester, ME1 3NX, Kent; emgardner@virginmedia.com; 01634 408595.

Medway Archives Centre

32 Bryant Rd, Rochester ME2 3EP; 01634 332714; malsc@medway.gov.uk.

We are pleased to announce the launch of our 2024 lecture series. Please drop in, ring or email to book your place and buy a ticket. **Admission by ticket only.** Tickets are £4.00 per lecture, or £20 for the entire series. The next lectures are as follows:



Cleaning and caring in progress.

Here's a look at what we've been up to since our last update...

Our series of Saturday drop-ins continued in October with *Focus on... Medway Forts*, and this proved extremely popular, with many visitors surprised to learn how many forts there have been in the local area! Our November drop-in *Focus on ... Your Local Street* gave customers a chance to learn more about how to research the local area.

Dan Gardner's photographic exhibition *Once upon a time in Medway* captured the untold stories, forgotten spaces, and old landscapes that make Medway what it is today. The exhibition closed at the end of 2023, and we look forward to seeing more of his thought-provoking work.

We ran another series of reminiscence sessions during the autumn and enjoyed making new friends. These sessions have become a regular feature of our calendar and we will run some more in 2024.

Our session *Marvellous Maps* was aimed at 7- to 10-year-olds and ran during the school autumn break. Families spent an enjoyable afternoon being inspired by some of our special maps and had fun creating their own map to take home.

On 8 November, *Their Finest Hour* was an Oxford University led project, aiming to capture stories, objects and artefacts from the World War Two before they're lost to history. The Digital Collection Day was a great success and thank you to everyone who came along. On page 11, Emma Ovenden gives an overview of the project and the day.

Finally, it was lovely seeing so many of you at our Christmas drop-in, and we hope you enjoyed it too! We have a full programme of events for 2024, so please keep any eye out for our publicity or sign up to our council newsletter to find out more.

Volunteers

We could not run many of our events without the help of our wonderful volunteers and supporters. Thank you to everyone who greeted our customers, chatted at reminiscence sessions, made refreshments or generally just made our customers feel welcome at MAC. Our volunteers also help us behind the scenes, researching local people, events and places. They provide invaluable help with listing new acquisitions, create indexes which help customers access our collections, and offer family history help. If you are interested in volunteering at Medway Archives Centre, please do email us. We offer remote and on-site opportunities and hope to develop more volunteer projects in 2024.

For forthcoming events at the Medway Archives Centre, including the exciting 2024 Lecture Series, please see page 41.

Subscription Renewal Reminder

FOMA Membership subscriptions are due for renewal from 1 January 2024.

You can renew on the FOMA website <https://foma-lsc.org/membership.php>

As agreed at the 2023 AGM, FOMA subscriptions will increase from 1 January 2024, our first increase since the formation of the society in 2006.

The new rates are as follows:

single membership £12 - family membership £14 - society membership £18
life membership £120 - corporate membership £60.

If you have a standing order at your bank or a PayPal recurring payment, please change the amount as soon as possible so that the correct amount is paid.

If you would like to set up a standing order so that your subs are paid automatically then our bank details are as follows.

NatWest Bank, Strood. Sort code 60-21-02. Account number 48040304

Thank you!

Jean Skilling, Membership Secretary (membership@foma-lsc.org)

Readers' Letters

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

Chatham Town Hall Gardens

25 November 2023

Hi Amanda,

Some time ago [November 2022] I asked you to ask FOMA members, via *The Clock Tower*, if anyone knew anything about the missing memorial stone above the entrance to the Chatham Town Hall Gardens (photo attached).

None of our FOMA members contacted me, but my pressing Medway Council to ensure that it is reinstated seems to have borne fruit. I've just been to a consultation event about the project to improve the Town Hall Gardens and it appears that the money has come through to fund the work and if a final search to find the missing memorial fails, a replacement will be commissioned. It may be slightly smaller than the original as there are concerns about the structural integrity of the entrance gateway, but the inscription will be the same. Work on the project should begin in summer 2024. Progress of sorts.

Sandra Fowler.



Photograph by
Bryan Fowler.

I worked in men's wear, which was very interesting! I had to learn the difference between interlock and string vests, and how supportive x-front pants were. Luckily most of the customers were women, buying attire for their men folk, which saved a lot of embarrassment to a naive 15 year old. I also had to climb the tall shop ladder to get to the collar studs and spare shirt collars, and to do some of the shop dressing. The actual window dressing was performed by the manager, Mr Mortley. He showed me how to pin items of clothing more easily by running the pin through his greasy hair!

Thinking back on it, my parents were so protective yet I was sent to the Pitman's evening classes, walking alone over The Lines to Rock Avenue. I did, many years later, do some typing for the Hands voluntary organisation, so the course wasn't a complete waste of time. I typed hundreds of record cards which should have been really boring, but it was quite interesting and I enjoyed it. I also did some typing for GEC, unofficial and unpaid of course, but I did get annual leave when my husband was on holiday! The picture below is not the exact model that I had, but is as near as could be found !



A Remington typewriter

Notes

1. The Horsted Centre, Chatham, was opened in 1954, but was demolished in 2014, as was Rochester's City Way Centre. Both had closed in 2009 and courses moved to the new campus at Prince Arthur Road, Gillingham. This new building was officially opened in 2010 and is now known as MidKent College, incorporating the Maidstone Campus, formerly known as Oakwood Park Centre.

2. The shop numbers were (in 1938) 45 Church Street, 139, 141 and 143 New Road.

3. The chemist's is situated on the corner of New Road and Church Street.

In the next issue of The Clock Tower, (Issue 74, May 2024), Janet reveals the story of her first job as a junior sales assistant at A.E Hawkins and Sons.

Their Finest Hour at Medway Archives Centre

Emma Ovenden, Medway Archives Centre Librarian



The Medway Archives Centre (MAC) was delighted to hold a Digital Collection Day for the *Their Finest Hour* project on 8 November (see the photograph below). The day was part of a nationwide campaign organised by the *Their Finest Hour* project team based at the University of Oxford and funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The project collects and preserves the everyday stories and objects of the Second World War.



We were thrilled to receive some fascinating family stories at our Digital Collection Day, and received many positive comments from visitors complimenting us on how well the day was run. A number of visitors also said how pleased they were to have the opportunity to record memories and anecdotes of families and loved ones.

A range of objects were brought along to the day, including a file of sand from the Sahara, photos, letters, diaries, medals and even a panel from the side of a radio truck!

The stories and digitised images of the objects have been submitted to the *Their Finest Hour* project team, who are producing a digital archive. All digitised stories and objects will be free to access via the online archive, which will be officially launched on 6 June 2024 to coincide with the 80th anniversary of D-Day.

You can find out more about the project on their website at theirfinesthour.english.ox.ac.uk

Amanda Thomas has also provided copies of articles written for The Clock Tower on World War Two.

Medway Heritage News

Amanda Thomas

The Isaac Newell Heritage Group The Inaugural Meeting



On the suggestion of FOMA Member, Sandra Fowler, the Isaac Newell Heritage Group (INHG) was formed in late 2023 and met for its inaugural meeting on 6 December 2023 at the Medway Archives Centre (MAC). Group members comprise those with an interest in perpetuating the memory of Isaac Newell (1853-1907), and with the prime aim to erect a statue of him on the Strood waterfront; Adrian Pope (far right in the photograph) has been working towards this for the past 20 years. The members of the INHG include (in alphabetical order): Margarita Bitetti (Newell's great great granddaughter), Len Feist, Rob Flood, Sandra Fowler, Elaine Gardner (Friends of Medway Archives Chairman), Helen Worthy (Medway Archives Centre Manager), Adrian Pope, Cindy O'Halloran, Alex Thomas, and Amanda Thomas. Since the initial meeting we have also been joined by Jon Rye, Founder and Programme Director of Bubble and Scruff, and External Sports Consultant to Medway Sport, Medway Council.

As readers may recall, Isaac Newell was born in Taylor's Lane, Strood and pioneered football in Argentina. His educational ethos has been an influence and inspiration for the development of the modern game worldwide and in Argentina, at least, he is considered a figure of some considerable importance. At the meeting in December, it was agreed Margarita Bitetti would be the group's President, and we were delighted that Margarita was able to join us via FaceTime from Rosario in Argentina to participate.



At the inaugural meeting, from left to right: Elaine Gardner, Len Feist, Sandra Fowler, Helen Worthy, Cindy O'Halloran (holding a bust of Isaac Newell), Amanda Thomas, Alex Thomas, Adrian Pope.

Ker-chunk!

Janet King



I was born in the workhouse ! (All Saints Hospital) on Elizabeth Ward, and spent the first twenty years of my life living and working in Chatham. I became familiar with the high street as I worked at the west end and lived at the east end. I still live in Medway and am interested in its history, an interest kindled by one particular teacher at school.

Ker-chunk, ker-chink, ker-chink, clunk, ching. I was practising my typing. It wasn't that I was heavy handed, it was the ancient Remington typewriter (pictured overleaf) that I had been given to learn on. *Lean on* would be a more appropriate term. To say it was unresponsive was an understatement. My fingers were becoming more and more muscular by the day. The ordinary keys were bad enough but the shift keys really took some shifting. I had to almost lean on them with my elbow. Setting the tabs was a job that really needed pliers. The speediest typing I finally worked up to was twenty words a minute, not enough to secure any employment as a copy typist. I was more interested in the letters I was copying and their content and context, rather than building up speed. The cat was a better typist than I was, and certainly much more interested in the actual typing. She would hit a key and when the arm shot up to strike the paper she intercepted it and batted it back down with her paw. The bell was so loud that it could have summoned the staff - if only we'd had any. I think my machine could have been a reject from Rochester museum. Anyway, I dutifully practised on this heavy sit-up-and-beg machine, which brought a whole new meaning to the phrase *touch typing*. They, Mum and Dad, could have bought me a transportable machine even if portable was out of the question. I kept it on the floor of my bedroom. As it was so heavy, this was the only safe place for it, and that's also how the cat got involved with my practice.

It was 1964. I had been sent to Pitman's Secretarial College, but I was not keen on this idea, as I didn't like the idea of office work. I could have gone to Horsted College¹ but the theory was that the Pitman course started a year earlier, so I could find employment that much quicker, to fulfill this dream. You could go while you were still at school, and in theory, go straight to work when you left. We realised too late that the Pitman course, although much more thorough, would not have finished until I was sixteen. Luckily I was sent out to work in a shop as a junior sales assistant when I was fifteen, which I thoroughly enjoyed! The shop, a drapery, was A.E.Hawkins² along the New Road opposite St. Paul's church.³ The shop building still stands, and the part I worked is now a chemist's shop.

During the summer months, on a Sunday, the High Street would be totally blocked with traffic returning from the coast. In Strood, at Angel corner, a building (I think the Angel pub) jutted out overhanging the main road so tall vehicles had to traverse both lanes to pass it. The summer coastal traffic had many coach parties from the East End of London (coaches then known as charabancs) and their need to miss the overhang resulted in some enormous tailbacks. The line, at its peak, would reach from Strood back to Chatham Hill. Enterprising businesses would walk up and down the queuing traffic selling drinks and ice creams. Living directly on the High Street meant quiet nights did not exist during this period.

Well, there it is, my memories of Rochester High Street, and a few additions. No doubt time has blurred my recollections and perhaps there are others who can fine tune them. As a High Street, Rochester's had everything required to satisfy all shoppers' needs without the need to jump in a car. Nostalgia is not what it used to be!

Editor's Note

Readers interested in the history of Rochester High Street might also wish to read the following articles:

Rochester High Street Through the Eyes of a Child in the Early 1950s (Julie Gay):
Part I, 'Part One', *The Clock Tower*, Issue 50, May 2018;
Part 2, 'High Street to Star Hill in the 1950s', *The Clock Tower*, Issue 51, August 2018;
Part 3, 'From Northgate Onwards', *The Clock Tower*, Issue 52, November 2018.

Watts' Alms Houses Reminiscences; The Rochester High Street Project (Norma Crowe),
The Clock Tower, Issue 8, November 07.

Edwin Harris – Recollections of Rochester (Janet Knight),
The Clock Tower, Issue 8, November 2007 to Issue 17, February 2010; Issue 19, August 2010.

Edwin Harris – Recollections of Rochester (Alison Thomas), including:
'The Crown Hotel and its Famous Patrons', *The Clock Tower*, Issue 20, November 2010;
'No. 63 The City Coffee House', *The Clock Tower*, Issue 23, August 2011;
'Richard Watts and his Famous Charity' *The Clock Tower*, Issue 21, Feb 11, and Issue 22, May 2011;
Edwin Harris – Recollections of Rochester, *The Clock Tower*, Issue 25, February 2012.

Edwin Harris, Nooks and Corners of By-Gone Rochester no. 64, (Helen Worthy),
The Clock Tower, Issue 37, February 2015.

The tireless work of Adrian Pope, and his extraordinary enthusiasm for recognising the importance of Isaac Newell, prompted the exhibition at Rochester's Guildhall Museum in November 2022 entitled, *Isaac Newell: More than a Name* (see *The Clock Tower*, Issue 68, November 2022). This inspired Amanda Thomas to give a talk at the Medway Archives 2023 Lecture Series, *The Story of Isaac Newell: From Strood to Argentina and the Seeds of Modern Football*. Awareness of Isaac's story has therefore grown in the past year. Many more of us started to understand the importance to perpetuate Isaac's memory, not least because of the tourist attraction he has become and how this could transform the economy of the Medway area. We also knew that as a united group with the same objectives, we would achieve a lot more and faster.



Right: Adrian Pope and Margarita Bitetti at the opening of the exhibition on 7 November 2022, Isaac Newell: More than a Name. Since then the exhibition boards have been moved to Strood Sports Centre.

At the meeting we agreed the following:

The group's prime objective is:

- To erect a statue to Isaac Newell.

With a view to

- perpetuate the memory of Isaac Newell;
- capitalise on Isaac's iconic status in Rosario (Argentina), South America and elsewhere;
- create a focal point in Strood for tourists;
- boost the local economy.

The initial objectives of the group are as follows:

1. The erection of a statue to Isaac Newell

- i) The statue should be situated on the Medway waterfront, as close to Taylor's Lane as possible and with the bridge, cathedral and castle in the background, not just as a pleasant backdrop, but to advertise Medway's heritage in photographs taken of the statue.
- ii) The statue could be a bust similar to those in South America.
- iii) However, a full-size statue of Isaac might have greater impact an individuality – perhaps with him holding a football.
- iv) If we were to opt for a full-size statue, we could perhaps instigate a competition for local artists.

2. A blue plaque for Taylor's Lane

- i) The new Levelling-up and Regeneration Act (November 2023) has extended Historic England's power to operate the blue plaque scheme across England. We need to investigate if it might be possible for a plaque to be erected at Taylor's Lane to mark the birthplace of Isaac Newell. Medway Council also has the power to erect plaques.
- ii) We need to establish where in Taylor's Lane the Newell House stood, as much of this thoroughfare has been demolished.

3. A focus for Isaac Newell fans/tourists at the Medway Archives Centre

This might be an Isaac Newell display of some sort, including information.

4. An Isaac Newell Heritage Trail

The trail could include the following key places: the statue of Isaac Newell, Taylor's Lane, 5 High Street (see above), St Nicholas Church, the Medway Archives, Strood Sports Centre (which already commemorates Isaac), and Higham (where the family later moved).

Leaflets for the trail and advertising of the same would, of course, incur costs. We realise that if we are in a position where the financing of leaflets etc. is not forthcoming, we can still put the heritage trail on the Friends of Medway Archives (FOMA) website and this can be accessed by a QR code. Leaflets and QR codes should be readily available at key sites such as the Tourist Information Centre, Strood/Rochester Stations and the Medway Archives Centre.

In the days following the inaugural meeting, I (Amanda Thomas) began looking into the records for the family's residence at Taylor's Lane. Sadly, the house number was not recorded anywhere, including the 1854 death certificate of Mary Ann Savage Newell, Isaac's mother. Neither were the house numbers of near neighbours recorded, which might lead to the conclusion that the houses in Taylor's Lane, like many other tenement-style buildings of the time, were not considered *substantial* enough to have a house number. I did also discover that the houses lining this alley which led from the High Street to the river were demolished a very long time ago at the beginning of the twentieth century to make way for the building of Aveling and Porter's *first* factory, not the George Bond designed building which was more recently taken down.

Whilst I was trying to find out more information about Taylor's Lane, I realised that the location of an earlier Newell residence had, in fact, been in plain sight all along. In the 1851 Census, their address is given as 5 High Street, Strood, and that Joseph Newell's occupation was *fishmonger*. Early photographs of this part of the High Street show that this stretch has always been occupied by shops, and it seemed highly likely that the family lived over theirs. After some considerable detective work, investigating the position of buildings and their numbers, I realised that 5 High Street is still standing and is now Strood Food and Wine. Perhaps this building might also be worthy of a plaque, and it should certainly be included as part of the heritage trail.

From there to Eastgate House (then Rochester Museum) where I only recall a tea room and garage called Esplanade Motors. Next to the museum was Morley's Bakers and another link road to Corporation Street. Sir Joseph Williamson's Mathematical School for Boys was next, then another pub (The Two Brewers), a dentist and then the infamous Theobald Square. This was a square of tenement style buildings in much need of renovation. It carried a certain reputation, mostly unjustified, but it was definitely a bit of a no-go area if you didn't live there. Next an art shop (?), a vet's surgery, Richard Watts' poor house, and the British Gas showrooms. After this was The Gordon Hotel, a garage (the Rochester Motor Company), Alan G Smith's tool shop, Lane's toy shop and another bank (the TSB). Then there was a men's hairdresser (Cutting Crew), a furniture shop(?) and we are back at Northgate.

Moving down towards Corporation Street was a tyre fitting garage and opposite that Rochester Library. At the rear of number 48 and the TOC H building was our garden which led to Epaul Lane. There was sited Rochester Police Station, formerly The Palace Theatre, and I still have a piece of the stone exterior wall from when it was demolished. Next to that was Trice's Garage which later became Castle Garage where I served my apprenticeship under Mr William (Bill) Brereton, formerly of St Asaph.

Moving up towards Boley Hill and beyond the garage was a block of houses which had been hit by an incendiary bomb during World War Two. My walk to St Margaret's School took me past these ruins and, at the time, made for a nervous walk. I could hear all sorts of noises from these derelict spaces. Also en route was Gollin's Tuck Shop, a target for the boys (and exclusive to boys in those days) of King Edward's private school. Next to St Margaret's School was Buckett's small shop and the bakehouse where all their wonderful products were produced. Thanks, Charlie Buckett for some superb meat pies!

Back to Mr Bellamy's paper shop. I had my first taste of work there, starting my paper round at the age of 12 years. 13 years was the correct age to start, provided the school doctor said you were fit to do the job – oops, I perhaps shouldn't have mentioned that. I started at 6.00 in the morning (7.00 on Sunday) and the round took me along the High Street towards the bridge. Gerry's café was always a problem as the dogs used to watch me and then stand at the entrance to the square daring me to pass, at least that is what it felt like. After that I went round into Castle Hill, part way towards Boley Hill, into Minor Canon Row, St Margaret's Street, down the back of the Castle onto the Esplanade, back to the High Street, down into Corporation Street then back to the shop. All in all about an hour and a half. Then back home for breakfast followed by an hour's walk to school at Warren Wood. On Sundays the round was split into two as there were so many supplements it was not possible to carry the sack. My wage, I think was 12/6^d per week, about 62½ p in today's money.

In around the late 1950s early '60s, I recall the High Street was resurfaced and all the traffic diverted via Corporation Street. It was chaos. Once they had removed the tarmac surface they found tram lines set in the old road and laid in wooden blocks.

Next there was a council property which was under the clock that hangs out over the High Street. Finally, at Northgate, the Northgate Inn. This was a centre for the Teddy Boy brigade and had a rough reputation. The landlord was an ex-body builder and ran a very tight ship, but there were frequent altercations, generally on a Friday or Saturday night.

Crossing the High Street again and going back towards the bridge, The King's Head hotel was followed by Buckett's the baker's shop, whose bread and meat pies were of exceptional quality, and then a wooden constructed shop which amongst other things sold stamps for collecting. It was also the HQ of TOC H and The British Legion.

Now we go from Northgate in the direction of Star Hill. The first premises are a tea room, next to which I recall was an antiques shop run by a retired dentist named Mr Thompson. Then came McFisheries, managed by Fred (?) and a dairy shop (?). Yet another Bank, a small archway leading to the Cathedral, Gold Medal (?) and Caroline's record shop. Much of my wages were converted to 45s and I still have them today! The war memorial was followed by a paper shop (Mr and Mrs Bellamy's – more on them later). I think a jeweller's (Mr and Mrs Nash) and next Casa Ventana. Casa Ventana was opened by Tony Di'Angeli and he experienced a problem with the City elders because the juke box music could be heard in the High Street! As a result, he opened up the cellars beneath the shop and moved the music below ground. Many a happy hour was spent there drinking the frothy coffee and listening to music. Somewhere near here was Freestone's the chemist's and Newman's the baker's.

We then have Pendelton's optician's and Kemsley's butcher's shop; Mr Boast was the manager and I recall going to play there with Robin Boast, a school friend. A greengrocer's next, formerly WH Smith's (Mrs Dale and her son Bunny) and then Leonard of Rochester, the grand department store. We could only look through the windows and wish. The Eagle Tavern was next door with a small alley which led to a small open garden near to the old City wall. My next recollection is that of a grocery shop on the corner of Crow Lane, I believe called Home and Colonial? Later in life, after passing my driving test I drove their old Bedford van doing home deliveries of groceries around Rochester and Strood. Is there nothing new?

Going up Crow Lane was Vines Garage, but from Crow Lane my memory is a bit misty. I do recall a dry cleaner's (Achille Serres?), Bata shoe shop, the Castle Tea Rooms, Dove Phillips and Pett, drinks supplier, the SEB (Southern Electricity Board) shop, then Skipper's paper/sweet shop. Mr Skipper was at some time, I think, Mayor of Rochester. After Skipper's was Boucher's butchers and then Vyes the grocer. Then, on the corner of Victoria Street, there was Gentry and Baily record shop.

Crossing over and returning towards Northgate, there was Capon's the butcher on the corner of the High Street and Corporation Street, then a sweet shop (?), the Post Office, Christine Theobald's flower shop and The Queen Charlotte pub. A small road linked the High Street to Corporation Street then Simes animal feed store.

At the end of January, Adrian and I also spent a day supporting Kent University student Oliver Small and his colleague Cecilia Kang. Oliver had contacted Adrian about making a documentary film, as part of his course work, but which might also later be uploaded to YouTube. I had recently finished filming for another Channel 5 history documentary and suggested I might come to help structure the content of the film and to share some of my experience with Oliver. Unfortunately, it was a bitterly cold day when we met in Rochester's Castle Gardens, but nevertheless Oliver still managed to film some key elements of the documentary, including an interview with Adrian. Oliver is now in discussions with Helen Worthy at MAC to see what illustrations he might be able to use to chart the history of Isaac Newell's life.



Adrian Pope holding a Newell's Old Boys shirt in roughly the place where we envisage the statue to be situated. Filming Adrian are Oliver Small and his assistant Cecilia Kang as part of Oliver's documentary film about Isaac Newell. Photograph by Amanda Thomas.

Many other things have been going on, which will be reported in *The Clock Tower* in due course, including our meeting with Medway Council, which seems now to be much closer to happening.

The INHG will meet again on 7 March. If you would like to get involved or if you feel you can contribute to our activities, please contact Amanda Thomas at: editor @foma-lsc.org .

The Dickens Chalet Restoration Project – A Further Update

Readers will recall that following the initial enthusiasm in October 2023 regarding the launch of the National Heritage Lottery Fund's Heritage Places initiatives, there were some concerns for the Dickens Chalet Restoration Project and whether this could start in 2024. Following the announcement, Ed Woollard (Medway Heritage Services Manager) made a statement, as follows, and as published in the previous *The Clock Tower*:

‘At the time of the meeting I had little information on the new relationship with NLHF, and the processes are still a bit unclear, but I do know that we will not be bidding for the chalet in November as the first bid is about logistics staffing and research and also due to the Council’s current budget situation. As has been reported, Medway is amongst a number of councils facing significant funding gaps next year and is having to take some hard financial decisions. In this context, NLHF’s announcement of its new investment relationship with Medway is still excellent news for heritage in general, but perhaps less immediately pertinent to the chalet project. The project would rely on council match funding from a capital pot and the council’s current acute need to balance its budget means it cannot responsibly commit to any capital spending in a timescale that allows the chalet project to happen in 2024. Once it has more certainty, the council will continue to work on the options for the Chalet.’

In November Rachel Kerr (Project Coordinator, Medway Council Tourism and Heritage Service) issued the following statement to stakeholders:

‘As announced at the stakeholder meeting and officially confirmed in my last stakeholder update (sent out on 13th October), Medway has been chosen as one of NLHF’s 20 *Heritage Places*. Unfortunately, this has coincided with a time of profound financial reckoning for the council. Strenuous effort continues to be made across all directorates to reduce costs and generate additional income to bring expenditure back within the budget agreed by the council earlier this year.

You can read the latest statement about the financial position here: https://www.medway.gov.uk/news/article/1581/council_financial_position_improves_for_second_quarter_but_still_more_to_do

The council has commissioned the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) to undertake a Resilience Review of the council’s finances, with the work scheduled to conclude before the end of December 2023.

While we continue to believe that ultimately the chalet will benefit greatly from our new NLHF relationship, the timing of the CIPFA review makes it impossible to include a bid for the chalet in the first round of applications to NLHF. The capital funding that councillors allocated to the chalet project is ring-fenced, but will need to be borrowed. The resultant interest payments would represent costs that have not been accounted for, and would need to be found from revenue streams. So, ahead of councillors receiving, absorbing, and responding to CIPFA’s findings, we have been told the council cannot commit to any match funding for the application; it must first close the projected spending gap for 2024/2025. This means we will not be in a position to restore the chalet in 2024.’

The Amplifier Room

Multi Broadcast hired out radio speakers. These were fitted in houses and my father was responsible for all installations in Rochester and Strood. There were similar amplifier rooms in Chatham (near to Luton arches) and Gillingham (in the High Street). Radio programmes were transmitted to our house from the BBC studios and then amplified before being transmitted, via overhead cables, to home speakers. A wall-mounted switch in the house wall allowed people to listen to the BBC Light programme, BBC Home service and, in the evenings, if I recall correctly, Radio Luxembourg.

Adjoining our house was an old scullery and within this building was a Dorman diesel engine. In the event of a power cut (which in the 1950s was a regular event), my father would go down to the scullery (ably assisted by me!) and start the engine. No mean feat, as he had to crank the engine by hand. Once the engine was running, he would switch over from mains electricity to portable to restart the amplifiers, thus ensuring all customers could listen to the radio, albeit in the dark. He also rigged up a light bulb in our living room so we had light!

There were barriers in front of the amplifiers and only my father and other workers were allowed to enter the amplifier space. However, I was allowed to switch one amplifier to a *play* position, and once a week I would descend to the amplifier room to listen to *The Goon Show* (alone as my parents and sister never really understood my type of humour).

The High Street

I am going to try to walk from number 48 along toward Rochester Bridge, cross back to Northgate then back to 48. After that I am going from Northgate towards Star Hill, cross over and come back to Northgate. The period I am covering is the 50s and 60s so there may be some crossovers, and there will be some gaps which other people might be able to fill in. Here we go!

Next to number 48 (in my mind’s eye) is the old *leaning* building on the corner of 2 Post Alley. It has had many lives but I cannot recall any of them! Next a bank (Nat West), Cobbs gentlemen’s outfitters, Dale’s grocery (I recall the smell of roasting coffee on, I think, Fridays), Ryder’s chemist (and Mr Clark the chemist with his Poirot style moustache). There was a second Ryder’s shop which sold perfume etc, Robey’s shoe shop, the Bull Hotel, Gerry’s Transport café (Gerry had two great dane dogs which terrified me on my morning paper round), and finally The Crown pub.

Crossing the road and heading towards Northgate, the first building was The White Hart pub, then Rochester’s Guildhall. Following this was Len Chamber’s bicycle shop (now the wonderful Baggins bookshop) and then the Co-Op department store. A small alley separated the Co-Op from the George Inn which was next to Collis’s hardware shop. Another bank next (National Provincial?), then Ogden’s hairdresser’s, Leonard Darly solicitors and yet another bank (Barclay’s?).

Rochester High Street Leonard Dormon



I was born in Bexleyheath in 1944 and the family moved to Rochester in about 1947. I attended St Margarets Primary School, followed by Troy Town (later moving to Warren Wood) and, finally, Medway College of Technology on New Road Chatham. My apprenticeship as a motor mechanic was at Castle Garage, Boley Hill. I joined CAV London (part of the Lucas group) and remained with the group for 23 years, living during this time near Reading. This was followed by 7 years with Woodhead RSR, and another house move to the Northampton area. My final work took me to near Cardiff for 10 years after which I took early retirement. My wife and I sold up and bought an old house in France. We spent two years renovating our property and now have a nice life in the Loire Atlantique. I have two daughters, both born in Rochester, five grandchildren and two (shortly to be three) great grandchildren. I joined FOMA in 2023.

Beginnings

I was born in February 1944 in Bexleyheath, then part of Kent. The family later moved to Rochester and my sister was born in July 1945 at 2 Union Street, Rochester. Some time after we moved to a flat on Star Hill, Rochester, number 4 I think. Then in 1949 we moved to 48 High Street, Rochester. The house was three stories high and the ground floor had been converted to a retail shop for Multi Broadcast and, at the rear, there was what was known as *the amplifier room*. More on that later. The first floor had two spacious rooms, the rear being a kitchen and living space, and at the front was the *front room*, used on Sunday afternoons and special occasions. The next floor up consisted of two bedrooms, the rear one partitioned to allow for a toilet/bathroom with a gas multi-point water heater. The third floor also had two rooms but the floorboards in the front one were in poor condition so that room was never used. Finally, there was a glass atrium and an opening onto a flat roof where we had a panoramic view of Rochester including the river. From top to bottom there were 57 stairs and a continuous banister rail which, to my parent's horror, I regularly slid down. Finally, there was a cellar under which during building works some years' later, evidence of the Roman High Street was found.

Commemorating the 1984 Closure of Chatham Dockyard

*Forty Years On. Chatham and its
Dockyard:
Regeneration, Repurposing and Renewal*
Norma Crowe

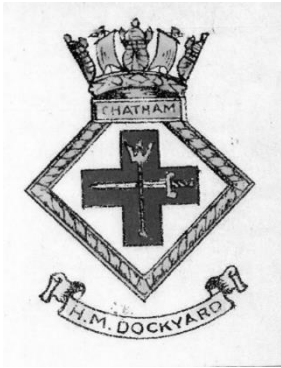


Norma grew up in Wiltshire on the edge of the New Forest and attended grammar school in Salisbury before university in Durham. After graduating in 1979, she embarked on a career in libraries starting with two years in Oxford at the Radcliffe Science Library. After completing a PG Diploma in Librarianship at Newcastle Polytechnic, Norma worked in public libraries in London and Southampton as a children's librarian, then moved to Kent and worked in FE at Erith College of Technology until May 1995. She then became Heritage Officer (later Local Studies Librarian) at Rochester upon Medway Studies Centre. Medway holds a special place in Norma's heart. Although the job title and Centre name changed several times, she was in the same role as Local Studies Librarian until July 2021 when she retired. Norma is married with two grown-up daughters and two grandsons.

Part One: Early Days and Closure

Introduction

For more than 400 years the presence of the naval Dockyard at Chatham shaped the development of the Medway Towns and contributed largely to the wealth and status of the area. However, forty years ago in March 1984 the Dockyard was closed and this was seen by many in Medway at as an act of betrayal, folly and short-sighted decision making. Nationally it was a time of de-industrialisation leading to high unemployment especially for those working in the manufacturing, engineering and construction sectors and was to be disastrous for the lives and livelihoods of many local working people in Medway. It would be fair to say that Chatham has never quite recovered from the exit of the Royal Navy and the closure of the Dockyard. But, after 40 years Medway *has* moved on. It has not been easy, however derelict land and blighted buildings both within and around the Dockyard have been repurposed, redeveloped and given new lease of life. Exciting regeneration projects have been completed and some are still under way.

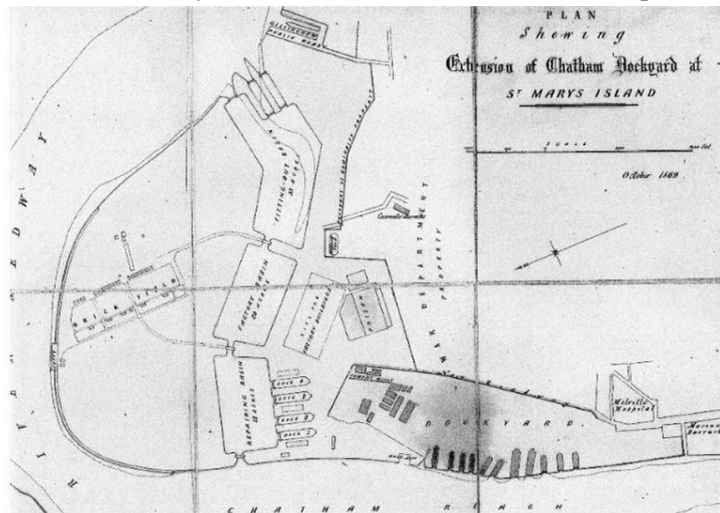


This article is a brief look at the Dockyard during the last 150 years; its expansion, retraction, redesign and demise, followed by its rebirth and regeneration since 1984. It is a vast subject, and I can only offer a reflection of the times through the reportage in both the local and national press, monographs, printed material produced by the Navy or the Dockyard itself and contemporary reports and statistics.

Badge of the Dockyard.

Chatham Dockyard in the 19th Century

The early years of the century were dominated by conflicts, notably the Napoleonic Wars. Frequent naval engagements meant that the Royal Dockyards were at full stretch building adapting and repairing the fleet. In the years following the wars the Navy Board and Admiralty carried out a series of reviews into working practices, ship design and maintenance all of which affected Chatham. The innovation of steam power led to many changes in working practices; it also saw the development of iron clad vessels, steam powered machinery and the decline of wooden built ships under sail.



River Medway and Chatham Dockyard 1828. Drawn by G. Shepherd, Engraved R. Roffe, published G. Virtue. Medway Archives Centre illustrations collection.



Lieutenant Samuel Walters' own drawing of the wreck of the Venerable in 1804. Courtesy of National Museums Liverpool, Merseyside Maritime Museum Archives, Accession no. DX/1146.

Notes

1. From *Admiral Collingwood* by Max Adams, 2005, p189.
2. *Naval Chronicle*, 1804 vol.12 p.497.
3. From *The Memoirs of an Officer in Nelson's Navy*, 1949 and reprinted in paperback in 2005.

And later, ‘the total borne on her books the day she grounded was 555; the following day the number mustered was 547; but of the missing only four are known to have suffered.’ Again, ‘on the morning of the 11 December 1804 a court martial was held on board the *Salvador del Mundo* in Hamoaze to try Captain Hunter, his officers and ship’s company for the loss of the *Venerable*. They were all honourably acquitted except for one man, who was found guilty of drunkenness, disobedience of orders and plundering the officers’ baggage. He was adjudged to receive 200 lashes around the fleet as an example.’²



Drawing of the loss of the Venerable by an unknown artist. National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London.

Another account, made by Lieutenant Samuel Walters who was serving on the *Goliath* at the time and whose journal was published by C. Northcote Parkinson in 1949, tells us that, ‘The squadron of the Channel Fleet to which the *Goliath* belonged – about ten ships – was at this time in Torbay, in an interval between spells of close blockade duty off Ushant, and actually put to sea at 6 pm. The occasion was marked by the wreck of the *Venerable*, 74, Captain Hunter, which ran on a rock. The *Impetueux* and *Goliath* were the nearest ships and sent their boats to pick up the survivors. These, with the *Frisk*, cutter, saved the whole of the crew, Walters himself commanding the *Goliath*’s boats.’³ Perhaps John Grant was saved by Lt Samuel Walters?

This experience must have remained with John for the rest of his life and taught him to respect the sea. It highlights the precarious conditions of a sailor and, even in a position of relative safety off Torbay, shows that sailing ships were at the mercy of the weather at all times. And John was still only 13 years old! I have deposited my full notes on John’s life at the Medway Archives Centre.

To enable the building of larger ships and to modernise the yard, major extension works began in the 1850s. By 1854, the Admiralty had acquired or purchased all the land adjacent to the Dockyard, including St Mary’s Creek and St Mary’s Island. Deep water basins were dug following the route of the creek and these were lined with thousands of bricks which were made on site. Most of the workforce were convicts, including Fenians and French prisoners of war. They were inmates of the prison built specifically to house them during the works which could accommodate up to 2,000 men. By 1885 the extension works were largely complete, and the prisoners were dispersed to prisons elsewhere. The convict prison was demolished in 1898 and the extensive former Naval Barracks were subsequently built on the site.



Dockyard extension plan, 1869; Medway Archives Centre Naval Collection, CD, 623.83 FUL.

Chatham Dockyard in the 20th Century: Hopes, Fears and Final Years

With the extension of the Dockyard and its better facilities the new century began with hopes for a bright future and further expansion, but it was not to be. In 1905, *Army & Navy Illustrated* reported that the Admiralty was channelling funds to Rosyth Dockyard to the detriment of Chatham. There was also disquiet at the number of new builds being commissioned from private yards. On 18 April 1906 an indignant article in the *Naval and Military Record* stated:

The municipal authorities of Chatham do not intend to allow the Dockyard to be reduced to a mere repairing establishment without a strong protest. Rightly or wrongly, there is a growing feeling that an attempt is being made to make a dead set at this establishment, and in some quarters no opportunity is missed of belittling the claims of the eastern yard to build ships.

One would imagine from some of the statements which appear in print from time to time that the passage of the Medway is so difficult and intricate as to render it a source of danger to any larger war vessel In the view of the Corporation the agitation comes largely from those who are interested, either directly or indirectly, in the private shipbuilding industry ... National establishments have a just claim to equitable treatment. This has not been the experience of late, private firms being given the work to the detriment of the Royal Yards, and it seems probable that this policy will be pursued in the future unless pressure can be brought to bear on the Admiralty to avert it.

These prophetic words have a ring of authenticity and could have been written in more recent decades. The building of battleships had effectively ceased at Chatham in 1905 with the launch of HMS *Africa*. The decision was taken to focus the yard's attention upon ship repairs and the construction of submarines. A total of 57 submarines were built by the yard; the first vessel was launched in 1908 and the last in 1966. For the last 16 years until the closure of the Dockyard, the workforce was engaged in repairs and refitting of Chatham Port vessels and the repair and maintenance of nuclear submarines.

O or Oberon Class submarine HMS Ocelot, 2,030 tons, launched 1962, completed 1964. Pictured at Chatham Historic Dockyard 2019; picture taken from aft by Hugh Llewelyn, Wikimedia Commons.



Military Spending Review and the Announcement of Closure

In the second half of the century after two world wars, Britain was effectively bankrupt. Defence spending was under pressure, with cuts to Army, Air Force and Navy budgets. Funds were diverted into providing an independent nuclear defence capability and there was no appetite for the maintenance of a large naval fleet.

Soon after coming to power in 1979, the Conservative Government ordered a major defence spending review. In 1980 it was announced that just four naval dockyards would be maintained. It was clear that changes would be made and given its location the Chatham yard was always going to be under threat. But when the announcement of total closure came in 1981 it was a terrible shock for those working in the Dockyard and for thousands in the Medway area. At least 400 years of involvement with naval defence was to come to an end.

The first part of this story discusses John Grant's time on the 3rd rate *Venerable* between May and December 1804. She carried 74 guns and was launched at Blackwall in 1784. In 1803 she had been the flagship of Vice-Admiral Collingwood who wrote the following comments to his father on the crew after arriving in port for repairs:

*'Poor creatures, they have been almost worked to death ever since. We began by discovering slight defects in the ship; and the farther we went in the examination, the more important they appeared, until she was discovered to be so completely rotten as to be unfit for sea. We have been sailing for the last six months with only a sheet of copper between us and eternity.'*¹

The *Venerable* had a crew of 450 which included 27 boys and, after the refit, she rejoined the Channel Fleet in the blockade of Brest and was assigned to the inshore squadron commanded by Rear Admiral Sir Thomas Graves. His main task was to keep the French Fleet bottled up in their home ports by maintaining a continual blockade and stop anything going in or coming out.

In September 1804 the captain of the *Venerable*, Barrington Dacres, was replaced by John Hunter (1737-1821). Hunter had been second in command of the *Sirius*, flagship of the first convict fleet to Australia in 1786 and later, between 1795 and 1800, the 2nd Governor of New South Wales.

For John Grant, to be looking directly at the French, experiencing the harshness of life aboard a warship with those hardy sailors and, literally, learning the ropes must have been invigorating, scary and quite exciting! He would have listened to the tales told by the seamen around him, taken it all in and, hopefully, enjoyed himself. Amongst the topics of discussion would have been the reputations of their ship and their officers.

By late November the *Venerable* was again returning to Plymouth and the crew may have thought that it would be a routine interruption to their severe life at sea. It wasn't! On the evening of 24 November, she was at anchor off Torbay with other ships from the in-shore Brest squadron when a storm blew up. The order was given to put to sea but the *Venerable* could not clear the rocks and she was shipwrecked at Roundham Head near Paignton. Several boats went to her aid including from His Majesty's cutter *Frisk*, the 3rd rate *Goliath* and *Impetueux* and luckily, by the end of the night, nearly all the crew were saved.

The *Naval Chronicle* reported that, 'the sea being very high and at times making a breach over her no boat could lie alongside so that the men were retrieved down from the stern with ropes. Being near the rocks, and having a rope from the shore to the vessel, several got on shore by that means; but a little midshipman in endeavouring to land in this manner quitted his hold and was drowned. Besides the mate and midshipman, the master and ten or twelve seamen were also lost.'

John Grant
Peter Bursey



Peter grew up in Gillingham and attended Twydall Infant and Junior Schools, followed by the Grammar School when John Hicks was headmaster. Various jobs eventually led him to the Civil Service in Whitehall until he retired in 2007. In 1988 Peter spent five months at Chatham Dockyard on the Gannet project going up to the Public Record Office and the National Maritime Museum archives at Woolwich Arsenal where he discovered the original plans of the Gannet's masts and spars plus an assortment of other useful papers. He now lives in Shaftesbury, Dorset

Part One: A Chatham Boy Joins the Royal Navy – in 1803!

A maternal ancestor, John Grant (c1790-1863), spent 25 years of his life in the Royal Navy – eleven of them during the exciting and dangerous times of the Napoleonic Wars. John was born and grew up in Chatham during the 1790s and it may be that his young imagination was fired up, if not by his father, then by his military surroundings. In 1803, he joined the royal navy as a 12-year-old Boy 3rd Class and, because he applied for and received a naval pension and, thanks to the careful collecting of records by the navy, his full service career is available at The National Archives where we find he served on six ships between 1803 and 1814. He then spent the years 1816 to 1828 at Sheerness Dockyard as a boatman before returning to Chatham to live for the rest of his life.

John Grant's Certificate of Service. Note that he joined as a Boy 3rd Class, became a Boy 2nd Class in March 1806 and an Ordinary Seaman in May 1808. The National Archives ADM 29/62/540.

No.	Character.	Ship.	Age.	Entry.	Rank or Rating.	Discharge.	Case.	Time. Years. Days.
15	Superior	51 Aug 03 B.S. 1	12	10 Jun 03	Boy 3 rd Class	10 Jun 03		
8	Venerable	9 May 04	"	16 Jun 04	Boy 2 nd Class	16 Jun 04		
9	"	28 Jun 04	"	10 Dec 04	Boy 2 nd Class	10 Dec 04		
7	St George	11 Dec 04	"	1 Mar 05	Boy 2 nd Class	1 Mar 05		
28	"	2 Dec 05 B.S. 2	13	1 May 05	Boy 2 nd Class	1 May 05		
802	"	2 May 05	"	19 Feb 06	Boy 2 nd Class	19 Feb 06		
792	Venerable	18 Feb 06	"	17 Jan 06	Boy 2 nd Class	17 Jan 06		
"	"	20 Feb 06	"	24 Dec 06	Boy 2 nd Class	24 Dec 06		
825	St George	25 Dec 06	"	19 July 07	Ordinary Seaman	19 July 07		
8721	Venerable	20 July 07	"	8 Oct 07	Ordinary Seaman	8 Oct 07		

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P. J. Wray

Newspaper headlines, Norma Crowe.

The people of Medway were not going to accept this without a spirited fight. Dockyard workers, Local politicians, MPs and Medway residents voiced their opposition and tried to argue for a change of heart, but the decision had already been taken and not even the sterling repair work done in the Yard during the brief reprieve of the Falklands War in 1982 helped to stave off the inevitable.

The next two years saw the numbers working in the Yard diminish and departments were decommissioned. Fortunately for us, some far-sighted individuals and institutions recognised the uniqueness of the early dockyard buildings. Pressure from respected bodies like the National Maritime Museum and Historic England and individuals, including the author Jonathan Coad¹, helped to ensure that the eighteenth century yard area was exempt from redevelopment. There were over 60 listed buildings and ancient monuments recorded within the area of the historic dockyard. On site, members of the Chatham Dockyard Historical Society, a group of enthusiastic workers and local people, set about preserving artefacts and documents which were important for the history of the yard, its employees and its working practices. Their aim was to preserve aspects of the working yard, and so they began to collect items from across the site to create a museum in the former Lead and Paint Mill (also known as the Painters' Shop).



Newspaper headlines and captions re closure

Notes

1. Jonathan Coad MA, FSA, FSNR is the President of the Society for Nautical Research. Their website states he '... an Inspector of Ancient Monuments responsible for research and conservation of [English Heritage's] monuments in East Anglia and later in south-east England. ... he was ... asked to identify and evaluate buildings and engineering works of historic and architectural importance in the Royal Navy's operational home bases. For much of his career he worked closely with the Ministry of Defence and later also with the Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust to secure a future for these.' His book, *Historic Architecture of Chatham Dockyard, 1700-1850* was published in 1982 by the National Maritime Museum.

My thanks to staff at the Medway Archives Centre and the Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust for their assistance in producing this article.

Return of a Lutonian: Horace Shirley Remembers

Brian Joyce



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

From the mid nineteenth century onwards, Chatham Royal Naval Dockyard expanded dramatically, and as a result there was an increasing need for working class housing. Workers and their families were arriving in the Medway Towns from all over the country, but the existing housing stock could not accommodate enough of them. At the same time, working class areas such as the Holborn area and Red Cat Lane near the parish church were demolished.

With Chatham surrounded by the River Medway and government-owned land, developers eager to exploit this situation had only a few options. One was to create a whole new township – New Brompton – on former agricultural land. Another was to develop the area lying between the village of Luton and the east end of Chatham. The latter was made possible by the improvement of the road from Chatham to Luton, and the change was chronicled by an anonymous writer in the *Chatham News* in 1881:

‘The narrow lane leading from Chatham to the village – at certain times of the year an almost impassable slough – has of late years undergone a transformation which has had the effect of materially altering the former sylvan features ... The innumerable habitations which have sprung up on each side of the now very creditable thoroughfare may fairly be said to constitute Luton, a suburb of Chatham itself ... ’

Until this process began, the land either side of the newly-improved Luton Road was covered with arable farms and orchards, although there were small pockets of housing such as Maida Place, a few recently-built public houses like the Clarendon Inn and the Elephant and Castle, a fairly substantial brickfield two thirds of the way along its south-eastern side and another adjacent to the village itself. The other side of Luton Road was bordered by an extremely steep bank separating it from the main London to Dover Road which lay roughly parallel. Consequently, this side was even less developed.

The young Horace, sleeping in his bed at his parents’ house in Maida Place was sometimes disturbed by thunderstorms which roused the brickmakers from their own beds. He described what he heard:

‘Weird it was, I recall, to be awakened at night during a thunderstorm and to listen to the shouting of the *brickies* as they hurriedly turned out to cover up with straw the newly made bricks on the *hacks*. Amid the awful peals of thunder and the flashes of forked lightning I remember my youthful spirits were often cheered as I heard the brick makers, when rushing to their work, continually yelling to each other, “Here comes black Jack over the hack, to make us all turn out and thack”³

They finished with what Shirley called a screeching yell: ‘Cock a doodle do!’

Horace Shirley did not remain in Luton as an adult. Although he was still living in Maida Place at the time of the 1871 Census. Later surveys reveal that he worked as a printer’s proof reader, firstly in Maidstone and then in Ashford, where he died in 1907.

After his nostalgic visit to Luton village in 1885 to look at its new church, Shirley summarised Luton’s transformation in a poem. An extract reads:

*Where once were cornfields and the meadow green
And all the beauties of a rural scene
Men’s habitations rise with rapid pace
And ev’ry landmark of the past efface
‘Brickies’ and brickfield too ‘have had their day’,
Though none regret that they have passed away,
Ev’n the ancient so-called ‘fair’ at last,
No longer links the present with the past,
From Luton now the Dockyard’s sons of toil
Are driving forth the tillers of the soil;
And ere another century has flown
A rustic ‘Lutoner’ will be unknown.*

Little did Horace Shirley realise that a hundred years later, ‘the Dockyard’s sons of toil’ would also have vanished from Luton when the Dockyard closed in 1984.

Notes

1. Does Horace mean the Brickmakers?
2. The Bible Christian chapel at the bottom of Connaught Road.
3. *Thack* meaning to put straw over the bricks to protect them from the weather.

‘Where the new Luton church now stands and from thence to the first ‘pub’,¹ was, at the time of which I am writing, a field without a house on it. In the summer, this field was covered with waving corn. On the opposite side of the road there was also an open field or small market garden, and at the back of this a hop garden. Of course, there were no paved paths and there was no gas. Luton Road from Maida Place to the old church was a dark and lonely one indeed on a winter’s night.’

The Brickmakers pub owed its name to the brickfields that lay nearby. By the time Shirley revisited that part of Luton Road, Edinburgh, Connaught and Albany roads covered the site, but he remembered that, ‘Luton brickfields were in full operation when I was a boy. These occupied a large portion of land on the right-hand side of the road as you walk to Luton, mainly on the ground now covered with houses at the rear of the ‘new’ chapel.² Beyond the chapel was the ground whereon the bricks were dried in summer, and hereon I had many games of hockey in the winter.’ Once the cleaned brick earth had been mixed with the appropriate amount of chalk, it was stored in *washbacks*, or large reservoirs, over winter. Most work was suspended until spring. Until then, wrote Shirley, ‘... these brickfields were most dreary looking.’ However, undaunted, little Horace and the other children played sliding games on the washbacks when they were frozen over.

Once the weather improved, a large and temporary workforce was recruited. Brick making was labour-intensive, as the bricks were hand-made at that time. Whole families were often recruited in teams to transfer the clay and moulded bricks to and from the moulders’ tables. Shirley wrote that the best moulders could shape up to a thousand bricks an hour. The newly-moulded bricks were then moved to the *hacks*, a system of wooden shelving, a few inches above the ground. They were left to dry there for up to two weeks before being fired.



Map showing Luton brickfields dated 1869; reproduced with permission of the National Library of Scotland.

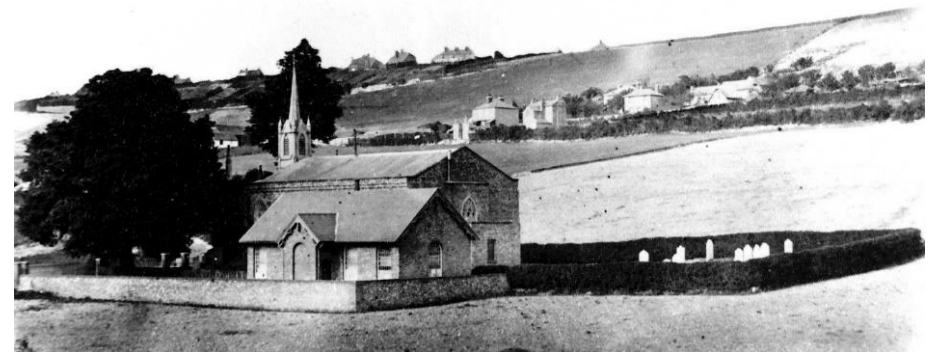
Chatham’s inexorable advance towards Luton village began in the 1850s, when the developer Henry Newnham purchased land near the western end of Luton Road and built, among others, the eponymous Henry and Newnham streets.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the process was more or less complete. Both sides of Luton Road were covered with housing, shops and pubs. Even the tricky northern side with its steep bank had been built on, including a long terrace cut into the slope to accommodate Thorold and Constitution Roads. A network of side streets leading off Luton Road stretched all the way to the outskirts of the original village. Chatham had reached Luton and the whole area to the east of the *Luton* railway arches had taken the village’s name.



An advertisement to let a cottage in Luton – still considered a rural haven. From the author’s collection.

Below: a view of the first Christchurch church built on a Luton field in 1842 to accommodate new development and the swelling population. Two further replacement churches have since been built, the latest in 1983, which is still standing. The church is now completely surrounded by houses and shops. From the author’s collection.



Horace Shirley, the son of a clerk, grew up in Maida Place in the 1860s and early 1870s but later moved to Maidstone and then Ashford. When as an adult he revisited his childhood haunts, he was struck and a little saddened by the changes. In articles for the local press, he looked back nostalgically at the Luton village of his childhood.

Actually, he observed that the village itself was ‘much the same’, although a few of his boyhood haunts had gone. The smithy near the Hen and Chickens pub which had provided winter warmth for young Horace’s frozen hands, had disappeared, as had Mother Collins’s sweet shop from which he had purchased home-made gobstoppers. Apart from that, the village was pretty much as he remembered it, including the village church. This place of worship dating from 1843, was originally a chapel of ease for St Mary’s parish church in Chatham. However, the development along Luton Road and its rising population led to the creation of Luton Parish. The church had already been described disparagingly by the anonymous writer quoted above as, ‘An indescribable sense of dejection pervades the very walls, seats and roof. The oddly fashioned benches remind one of a London mission room more than a country church ... Pulpit there is none, and the altar table, hung with Utrecht velvet of a not particularly unique tint, corresponds pretty well with the dowdiness of the rest of the interior.’ Horace Shirley remembered the building a little more affectionately when he revisited in 1885: ‘Not much altered did it seem as I gazed upon its peculiar spire, its barrack like walls and its quaint churchyard.’ By that time, though, the church of 1843 was empty, having been superseded by a new one built a little to the west.

When Shirley was a youngster, Luton was very much *Low Church*, thanks to its stern minister, the Reverend Joseph Fairbanks. The young Horace had been a bell ringer and remembered the rules governing death knells: ‘I remember the instructions from the old gravedigger Bates and schoolmaster Sinclair: “three times for a man, three twice for a woman and two twos for a child.”’ On winter evenings the church bells had to be rung in darkness, because the Reverend Fairbanks was afraid of fire and so would not allow candles.

Fairbanks also disapproved of the annual village fair, which was held each July. Many of the fair’s entertainments appear to have been anachronisms surviving from the Middle Ages which involved crude entertainment and heavy drinking. ‘This was the big event of the Lutonian’s year,’ wrote Shirley, ‘and what a fair! One or two *shows*, a roundabout and a few gingerbread stalls were the chief attractions, although in the evening there used to be special amusements such as climbing the greasy pole, dipping heads into water tanks for pennies etc and the extraordinary entertainment of *grinning through the horse’s collar*. Candidates for prizes for this latter amusement used to sit on a little stone wall opposite the village pub with a horse’s collar round their necks and then delighted the assembled rustics by making horrid faces.’ The person judged to have gurned the most repulsively received a prize.

The roundabout referred to by Horace Shirley belonged to ‘Mother Perfect’ and consisted of a ‘clumsy circle’ of wooden horses which revolved four or five feet off the ground: ‘A stout loafer used to push sometimes, but most movement was provided by boys – a free ride the reward. She whipped them if they did not push hard enough.’

Shirley remembered the puritanical Reverend Fairbanks striding determinedly through the throng with a Bible under his arm, staring straight ahead and looking neither right nor left at the drunken revellers who surrounded him. Other medieval survivals in the relatively remote village of Shirley’s boyhood included the sweeps and *Jack in the Green* who paraded through the village on May Day. At Yuletide, a green-robed Father Christmas, ‘was carried on the shoulders of sturdy rustics from door to door in a little cabin decorated with evergreens.’

Horace Shirley told his readers that in summer, small travelling circuses sometimes visited Luton village ‘with one or two shows of the *fat woman* type. There was usually a temporary stage outside the entrance to the circus, and you could enjoy a variety quite free of charge. A young lady would strut about the stage in gorgeous attire accompanied by other beautifully bedecked performers. All the time a frightful racket would be kept up by a performer on the big drum, and two or three instrumentalists of a very brazen order. Occasionally the clowns would appear and sing along.’

Shirley also remembered a group of strolling players, ‘The Seven Champions’ dressed in the costume of a doctor, a sweep, two knights and so on. They visited shops and cottages reciting doggerel, each verse starting with ‘Here Comes I’. For example, a player dressed as The Devil intoned:

*Here Comes I Beelzebub,
On my shoulders I carry a club,
In my hand a dripping pan,
Don’t you think I’m a jolly old man?*

The ‘knights’ might act out a swordfight, and the ‘doctor’ then cure their wounds. After these performances were over, a box for donations would be passed round. Incidentally, this traditional form of entertainment was not peculiar to Luton and appears to have survived in rural areas nationally. The characters portrayed seem to have varied according to locale. In Ireland, for example, they included St Patrick and Oliver Cromwell.

By the time Horace Shirley revisited Luton village in the 1880s, these primitive rural diversions had disappeared. Luton was by then a contiguous part of Chatham and had shaken off the last vestiges of its medieval past. Urbanisation, and no doubt, the efforts of clergymen such as the Reverend Fairbanks had seen to that. Urbanisation, in particular the changes to Luton Road, was what impressed Shirley the most. Thanks to the efforts of the Reverend Edmund Claydon, Fairbanks’s successor as Rector of Luton, a new church building was consecrated in 1885, shortly before Horace Shirley’s nostalgic visit. Shirley used it as a reference point to describe the then rural Luton Road of his childhood: