

# Open Days



The fully-accessible Bridge Chapel and Chamber are open to the public. Entry is free of charge and there is no need to book.

## Rochester Bridge in Times of Conflict

Temporary exhibition

Wednesdays & Saturdays  
11am-4pm

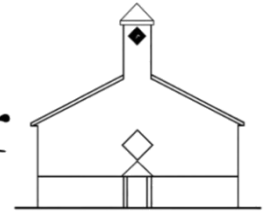
From 30 March until  
the end of July 2024

Please check [www.rbt.org.uk/  
events-resources/forthcoming-  
events](http://www.rbt.org.uk/events-resources/forthcoming-events) to confirm opening.



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

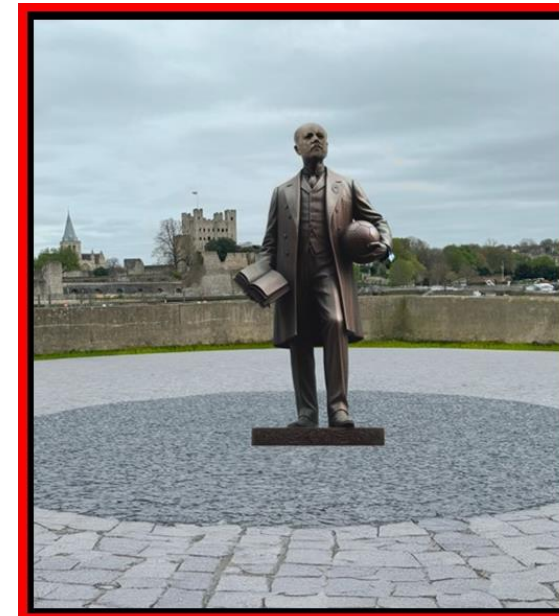
# The Clock Tower



Issue Number 74: May 2024  
£2.00; free to members

The Friends of Medway Archives  
Excepted Charity registration number XR92894

## A Green Light for the Statue!



*Image courtesy of Dr Alexander Thomas / Bing Image Creator / Adobe Firefly.*

On 8 May 2024, the Isaac Newell Heritage group was given 'approval in principle' by Medway Council for the Isaac Newell statue on Strood waterfront.

See overleaf for more on this exciting news.

PLUS

Commemorating the 1984 Closure of Chatham Dockyard – Part Two. See page 22.

The story of the Thames sailing barge building family, the Curels. See page 13.

Rochester Bridge In Times Of Modern Conflict - page 18.

## The Isaac Newell Statue

On 8 May 2024, the Isaac Newell Heritage group attended a Statue Summit Meeting with Medway Council. Amanda Thomas and Jon Rye presented the case, and Jon also produced a fabulous brochure for the meeting. The Group was delighted when the Council agreed in principle that the statue will take pride of place in Strood as part of the new waterfront development.

On the front cover of *The Clock Tower*, is the image Dr Alexander Thomas created using AI to show how the statue might look. The statue holds a football in one hand and an open book in the other, embodying Isaac Newell's vision for young people everywhere. His foresight of combining education with sport is his legacy and continues to be used in youth academies worldwide. The statue will be situated close to Isaac's birthplace in Taylor's Lane and his childhood home in the High Street. It is certain to become a huge draw for tourists - and an inspiration for everyone.



*Adrian Pope pictured after the meeting; photograph, Amanda Thomas.*

There is still a long way to go in the planning process, but hopefully soon, and in tandem with the Council, we will begin discussions about who will create the statue and – of course - start raising the money. All of our discussions will include the Newell family and we are indebted to Margarita Bitetti, Isaac's great great granddaughter for her support.

Perhaps most thrilled at the news was Adrian Pope (pictured) who has been campaigning for the statue for over 20 years. His determination to recognise Strood's most famous son has already resulted in some wonderful projects. Thanks to Jon Rye, and through various partnership initiatives with Medway Sport, Isaac Newell's legacy is already bearing considerable fruit. The 2022 exhibition *Isaac Newell: More than a Name* (see *The Clock Tower*, Issue 68, November 2022) has now become a permanent feature at Strood Sports Centre. There are now Mini Youth Games football tournaments linked to Isaac Newell, an Isaac Newell Trophy adult football competition with the Rochester & District Football League; and an Isaac Newell feature at Chatham Town Football Club. These initiatives use sport and heritage as tools to educate and the statue will become part of the suite of educational tools.

Much more is planned for this most exciting project!

## The FOMA AGM

The FOMA AGM on 12 April was very well attended this year. Perhaps this had something to do with the free raffle and Elaine Gardner's delicious cakes which we all enjoyed after the business was completed!

We were delighted at the AGM to vote on to the committee our new Membership Secretary, Ian Smith. He officially joined the committee at the next meeting on 2 May. More on the AGM on page 7

*Right: FOMA Chairman, Elaine Gardner and Secretary Dr Christopher de Coulon Berthoud.*

*Below: Elaine Gardner's cakes – always a treat!*



*Photographs by Amanda Thomas.*

## The Medway Archives Centre 2024 Lecture Series

The Medway Archives Centre 2024 Lecture Series has once again been a huge success. On 10 May - and to a sell-out audience - *Clock Tower* Editor, Amanda Thomas gave her talk, *The Real Oliver Twist: The Story of Charles Dickens and the Infant Pauper Asylum at Tooting*. Amanda's book, *Cholera: The Victorian Plague* includes a chapter on the 1848 tragedy at the Tooting children's workhouse and the role Charles Dickens played in bringing the appalling conditions there to the public's attention. During her research for the talk, Amanda unearthed a sinister and compelling story involving the trafficking of pauper children. Amanda repeated her talk at Rochester's Guildhall Museum on Wednesday 22 May. The MAC Lecture Series continues until July – for more information, see page 42.



*From left to right: Lecture Series organiser, Emma Ovenden, Amanda Thomas, and MAC Manager, Helen Worthy. Photograph, Nikki Pratt.*

## *The Committee*

### Patron

Professor Sir Robert Worcester KBE DL



### President

Russell John Race, JP, DL



### Vice President

Sue Haydock

### Chairman

Elaine Gardner

102 Valley View Road,  
Rochester, ME1 3NX, Kent.  
emgardner@virginmedia.com

### Vice Chairman

Rob Flood

rob@feetontheground.co.uk

### Treasurer

Sally Ironmonger

treasurer@foma-lsc.org

### Secretary

Christopher de Coulon Berthoud

4 Albert Road, Rochester, ME1 3DG,  
Kent.  
berthoud@blueyonder.co.uk

### Membership Secretary

Ian H. Smith,

40 Quixote Crescent, Frindsbury,  
Rochester, Kent, ME2 3XD.  
membership@foma-lsc.org

### Webmaster

Dr Alexander Thomas

info@foma-lsc.org

### Members

Natasha Boardman-Steer

Len Feist:

Cindy O'Halloran

Vanessa Sanderson

natasha@creatabot.co.uk

lfstrood@yahoo.co.uk

cindy\_ohalloran@hotmail.com

vanessa.sand12@gmail.com

### The Clock Tower Editor and Publicist

Amanda Thomas

editor@foma-lsc.org

## *Chairman's Letter*

Elaine Gardner



Hello! As I write this the sun is shining! Can we hope that the weather is finally moving towards summer? I hope so, there is only so much cold and wet I can put up with and it would be good to get out in the garden to tackle the rapidly growing weeds that don't seem to mind the conditions!

It was lovely seeing so many of you at the recent AGM (see page 7) and a pleasure to welcome FOMA member Ian Smith onto the committee to take on the role of Membership Secretary and allow Jean Skilling to finally retire. Thank you, Ian.

One of the items approved at the FOMA AGM was to increase annual overseas membership as the postage for *The Clock Tower* is now £2.50 anywhere in the world for our 100 gram limit. We have decided to give overseas members two options for 2025 – either increase annual membership to £18 and have a printed copy of *The Clock Tower* posted to you as usual, or remain on the £12 annual renewal and download your copy from the website. Here our Editor, Amanda Thomas publishes two versions: one is a download to read as a continuous pdf, and the other version is one that can be printed off as double sided. This is the same e-version we send our printers, Barkers in Rochester, and it can be simply folded as a book to read in the comfort of your armchair! It would be extremely useful to know your preference by emailing me at emgardner@virginmedia.com

This year's Lecture Series at the Medway Archives Centre (MAC) has been really interesting and informative, and we were delighted to hear that the talk by Amanda Thomas was completely sold out. If you haven't been to any yet, then there are still two opportunities for you with Brian Joyce in June and Catharina in July. Details can be found on page 42.

We have updated our membership leaflet and have included one for local members to whom we hand deliver copies of the journal. Whilst membership does continue to increase, it is important that we keep the momentum going and it would be great if each of you could encourage a friend or neighbour to join. If you receive your copy by post you will not find the new leaflet, I'm afraid, as it pushes our limit for second class postage over 100 grams. However, you could still encourage others to join, and details are on the FOMA website!



## New Members

A warm welcome to new FOMA members Vadan Modha, Geoff Ettridge, Caroline Lack, Trevor Hatton, and Richard Lewis.

\*\*\*

### IMPORTANT NOTICE FOR OVERSEAS MEMBERS

*The Clock Tower* is expensive to post overseas. In order to help cover costs, we will be raising overseas membership to £18 from 2025.

If you are happy to download *The Clock Tower* online, your subscription will remain £12.

Please let the FOMA Chairman, Elaine Gardner know your preference!

Please email at  
emgardner@virginmedia.com

### Subscription Renewal Reminder

**If you have not renewed your membership, this will be your last copy of *The Clock Tower*!**

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

## About The Clock Tower

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

### Editorial deadlines

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

**The copy deadline for Issue 75 of *The Clock Tower* is Monday 29 July 2024, with publication on Wednesday 21 August 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](mailto:info@barkerslitho.co.uk)

### Copyright

The copyright of the contents of *The Clock Tower* belongs to the Friends of Medway Archives and the authors and owners of any articles and photographs printed. The contents of *The Clock Tower* may not be reproduced without permission of the Editor and/or the Medway Archives Centre.

### 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](http://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](mailto:malsc@medway.gov.uk)

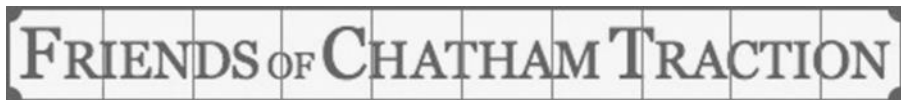
General enquiries about the Friends can be obtained from the FOMA Chairman: Elaine Gardner, 102 Valley View Road, Rochester, ME1 3NX, Kent; [emgardner@virginmedia.com](mailto:emgardner@virginmedia.com); 01634 408595. All correspondence should be directed to the FOMA Secretary: Christopher de Coulon Berthoud,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

Membership enquiries should be directed to the Membership Secretary, Ian H. Smith, 40 Quixote Crescent, Frindsbury, Rochester, Kent, ME2 3XD; [membership@foma-lsc.org](mailto:membership@foma-lsc.org)

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.

\*\*\*



Our AGM report; plus how the route to the Medway Heritage Bus is starting to take shape can be found by following the links below.

240331\_Update\_64

<[https://www.chathamtraction.org.uk/updates/240331\\_Update\\_64.pdf](https://www.chathamtraction.org.uk/updates/240331_Update_64.pdf)>

PDF Document · 277 KB

<[https://www.chathamtraction.org.uk/updates/240331\\_Update\\_64.pdf](https://www.chathamtraction.org.uk/updates/240331_Update_64.pdf)>

For more information see the website at [www.chathamtraction.org.uk](http://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](mailto: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](http://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](mailto:secretary@friendsofbroomhill.org.uk)



## Editor's Apology

My sincere apologies to Norma Crowe and Peter Bursey. During the finalising of the layout of the printable version of *The Clock Tower* (Issue 73, February 2024), a paragraph from Norma's article on page 30 slipped to the top of page 19 into Peter's article. Sadly, this was not spotted before *The Clock Tower* went to the printer's. The online version was immediately amended, and members were sent the correction by email so that the delivered printed copies could have the corrected page inserted into it. The slipped paragraph which should have started at the top of page 31 reads:

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.

\*\*\*

## The Isaac Newell Heritage Group

For the latest exciting news, see page 2.



*The Isaac Newell Heritage Group. From left to right: Elaine Gardner, Len Feist, Sandra Fowler, Helen Worthy, Cindy O'Halloran (holding Adrian Pope's bust of Isaac Newell), Amanda Thomas, Alex Thomas, Adrian Pope.*

## Medway Archives Centre Report

Helen Worthy, Medway Archives Centre Manager



### Catharina Clement



On Friday 19 April 2024, our longest-serving member of staff took her well-deserved retirement. Many of you will have met Catharina Clement during her time at Medway Archives Centre (MAC), and will have seen her at our many events, often volunteering in her own time. It is hard to imagine MAC without her, and she will be sorely missed.

Catharina started work as a casual member of staff in July 2007. She was busy juggling two jobs at the time, also working for Gravesham Libraries as a Library Assistant. She then applied for a permanent post at Medway Archives Centre and became an archives assistant on 8 December 2008.

*Photographs by Nikki Pratt.*

Of course, Catharina has seen many changes during her time at MAC. She remembers when most customers were researching their family history. Now, she feels, we help customers with more history-related enquiries, and staff do as much historic research as ever – busy with enquiries as well as preparing for exhibitions, projects and outreach.



As well as helping customers on-site, and replying to enquiries, Catharina has been largely responsible for our large (and ever-expanding) ephemera collection. She has also sorted our large collection of reports and managed our new book sales stock.

### 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.



### 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](mailto: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

## News and Events

Calendar of Forthcoming Events and Exhibitions

### FOMA Talks and Events

FOMA QUIZ Night  
Saturday 15 June, 7.30 pm  
Doors open 7.00pm

St Nicholas Church Strood, Lower Hall  
(Car park entrance off Gun Lane ME2 4UG)

Tables of 6 – bring your own food  
(you are welcome to come along and make up a table)

£5 per person - **booking essential**

For tickets, please contact Elaine Gardner –  
emgardner@virginmedia.com  
01634 408595/07733 154004

Please be aware that we are limited to 8 tables of 6 due to fire regulations.

Please check our website ([www.foma-lsc.org](http://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.

#### The 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.

Catharina has generously shared her knowledge of local history over the years with staff and customers, and has spent time ensuring a smooth handover to our new Assistant, Eleanor Cooke. We are thrilled, though, that Cat will return occasionally as a Casual Archives Assistant – and she has already returned in this role as a customer to work on her own research!

We know that Catharina will continue to be busy, even in her retirement. As well as her interest in her garden, and reading, Cat is the Secretary of the Chatham Historical Society and has her own research interests too.

To mark her retirement, Cat kindly provided afternoon tea for staff, and we enjoyed a fun afternoon (see pictured, opposite). Thank you, Cat, for all your hard work, enthusiasm and kindness to staff and customers. We wish you a long and happy retirement!

### *The FOMA AGM*

Amanda Thomas



The FOMA AGM took place on Friday, 12th April, 2024 at St Nicholas Church Lower Hall, Strood. This year there was an excellent turnout of members.

FOMA Chairman, Elaine Gardner gave the Welcome Address, as follows:

Welcome to this year's AGM and thank you for coming along. It is lovely to see you.

We have had a varied year with last-minute changes of venue, with the hall and church floor replacements and the unexpected discovery of asbestos under the church floor. We were lucky on both occasions to be able to hire St Luke's church hall at short notice, for which we say thank you.

Last year we were saying a lot of farewells, this year I'm pleased to say it has been 'Hello!' as MAC finally became fully staffed. As you will have read in your February *Clock Tower*, the new archivist, Sarah [Trim-West] was finally appointed in January, though I fear she is occasionally pushed into second place by Poppy, her hearing dog. Sarah is now very busy catching up with the backlog that awaited her arrival. Emma [Ovenden] is now full-time as Local Studies Librarian and Eleanor [Cooke] has been appointed as an Archive Assistant to replace Helen [Worthy] who became Archive Manager with Cindy's departure. Though I'm not sure that anyone could really replace Cindy [O'Halloran] with her wealth of local knowledge, we have been very lucky to recruit her to the FOMA committee.

If you were at MAC on Wednesday you will have picked up the notice of a talk by Sarah about Hearing Dogs on Wednesday 1 May as part of Deaf Awareness Week. [Sadly this talk was later cancelled.]

As you will have read in the minutes from last year's AGM, Jean [Skilling] had said she was standing down from the committee, but would hang on until her roles as both Treasurer and Membership Secretary were filled. We were delighted when one of our new members offered to take on the role of Treasurer back in September [2023] so Sally [Ironmonger] was promptly co-opted onto the committee and worked with Jean to transfer over the banking role which I think Nat West made almost as difficult as opening the online account in the first place! We have now had another member volunteering to join the committee to become membership secretary so I'm happy to say, Jean, that you can now finally stand down fully.

Thank you very much for all your hard work.

Unfortunately, Sally Ironmonger was unable to attend the AGM, but in her report, she first thanked Jean Skilling for all her hard work over the previous year, and for her generosity with the handover of the role.

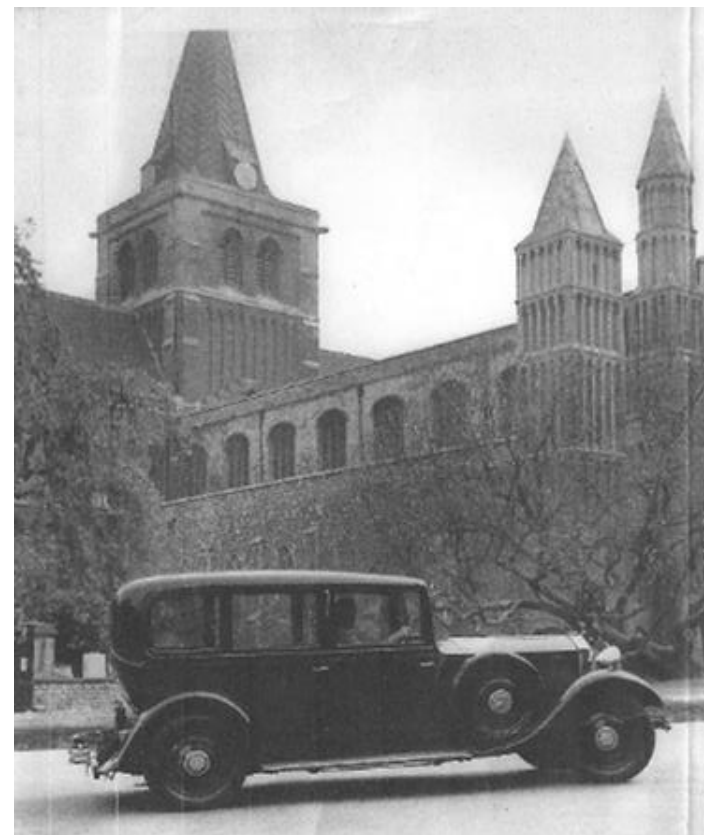
Sally reported that we were delighted once again to receive a donation from our Honorary Member Henk van Der Linden, and that we also received a donation from payments for talks given to other organisations from members. Subscriptions are up to £1,167 and hopefully, this will continue to increase, however, the income from talks has significantly decreased in comparison with 2022. The main expense continues to be the cost of printing and posting *The Clock Tower*, but our arrangements with Barkers (the printers) continue to offer good value for money and with no price increase. The cost of postage remains a challenge, particularly shipping to overseas members [please see page 4]. With the help of several volunteers, we have reduced the number of copies that have to go in the post to about 50 of the 130 or so we send out. Sally has purchased enough stamps for the next four mailouts before the price increase at the start of the month, but unfortunately we cannot do this for overseas mail as the price is printed on the stamp.

Additional expenses this year have included the renewal of our website domain name and the cost of a new server provider. Whilst with the latter there has been a slight price increase, the new server has considerably more storage and memory.

We ended the year with a deficit of £253. Sally thanked Laura Simpson for volunteering to undertake the Independent Examination of the accounts.

In his article, *Rochester High Street* published in the last issue of *The Clock Tower*, (Issue 73, February 2024), Leonard Dorman included the following description:

'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.'



*The Rolls Royce used for weddings; photograph from Leonard Dormon.*



30 April 2024.

Hi Amanda and Tony,

Nice to hear from you and I'm glad a few memories have been stirred.

I already have the picture [see below] and can remember the names, bar one. From left to right they are; George (I think) who did the accounts until Mrs Bolland (from La Providence took over), Harry Gurr from Cuxton (he was my teacher/mentor), Terry Turner from Luton (he was the other apprentice), Edwin (Bill) Brereton from St Asaph (owner) and Don Ryder from Gillingham (ex RAF. He was the foreman and shortly after the photo was taken emigrated to Canada with his family). I was on day release at Medway College of Technology when the photo was taken.

Also attached [below] is a picture of the Rolls Royce which was one of the wedding hire cars. Its registration number was BGU 860. It was, I think, a 1925 20/25 model and last time I checked, a few years ago was still on the road in Kent. Harry and I had the wonderful job of replacing the clutch in it - what a job!

I hope this is of interest.

Regards,  
Len Dormon.



*The Castle Garage, early 1960s. From left to right: George who did the accounts ?, Harry Gurr, Terry Turner, Edwin (Bill) Brereton (owner) and Don Ryder. Photograph from Tony Gray.*

FOMA Secretary, Dr Christopher de Coulon Berthoud spoke next. Chris has recently completed his doctorate which has meant he had to step back from his role. He thanked everyone who filled in for him during his absence, but now looks forward to being able to involve himself more fully with FOMA activities.

*Clock Tower* Editor, Amanda Thomas thanked everyone for their continued support. Thanks to everyone's contributions and the way in which Dr Alexander Thomas has set the journal up on the web, *The Clock Tower* has become a recognised publication in the heritage sector. Amanda discussed the content of the last year's issues and thanked individual contributors: Peter Bursey, Norma Crowe, Chris de Coulon Berthoud; Leonard Dormon, Elaine Gardner, Brian Joyce, Janet King, Emma Ovenden, Brenda Paternoster, Vanessa Sanderson, and Helen Worthy.

Amanda thanked Nic Nicholas who compiles the quarterly index to *The Clock Tower*, Alex Thomas, who maintains the FOMA website, the FOMA Committee, and the staff at the Medway Archives Centre. She also thanked Jon Barker of Barkers Litho Printers in Rochester who continues to do an excellent job printing *The Clock Tower*. He has also recently reprinted our membership leaflets. Thanks also went to Rob Flood and his contribution to the FOMA Facebook account, and Vanessa Sanderson who has set FOMA up on Instagram.

Alex Thomas, the FOMA Webmaster had sent his apologies, and Amanda read his report out. Alex commented on how in the last year, the number of unique visitors, visits, and hits have risen year-on-year by an impressive average of over 38%.

*The Clock Tower* and *The FOMA De Caville Index* remain popular resources. While last year's top downloads included issues 29 (the 1953 floods issue) and 21 (Medway Memories of the Battle of Britain), new additions to the top five this year include issues 31 (Celebrate Twenty Years of MALSC! and Memories of the 1953 Coronation), 43 (The Travels of a Tin Trunk / The Medway Hulks), and 11 (The Frindsbury Cricketers). *The Clock Tower* has experienced a total of 17,665 downloads since 1<sup>st</sup> January this year, and the FOMA De Caville Index pages have had over 3,500 views since the beginning of the year.

In January 2024, our previous Virtual Private Server, hosted by 123-Reg, was terminated and the FOMA website now operates on a new server. All data from the old server has been transferred and the cost of the new server amounted to £216, though the subscription for the first two months was complimentary. FOMA received a separate pro-rata refund of £100.27 due to the termination of the old server. The annual subscription for the new server in 2025 will be just under £260, approximately £9 more than before, however, it will provide as additional 30GB of storage space and an upgraded server specification. Our domain name (foma-lsc.org) was renewed in October 2023 for three years, until 2026, for £50.57.

In her report, Medway Archives Manager, Helen Worthy thanked FOMA, and the committee in particular, for all their support over the past year. Her report continued:

Their [FOMA's] support has been invaluable, ranging from giving lectures to purchasing documents on our behalf, and from supporting our events to helping with publicity and raising our profile in the local community and beyond.

I would also like to thank our team of volunteers who generously give their time and expertise to Medway Archives Centre. Their projects range from listing collections to researching local history, and they also support our events, chatting to customers and (most importantly!) making refreshments and generally making people feel welcome when they visit.

We have had a busy year, so here is a brief overview. If you'd like to know more about our collections, our outreach, or the services we offer, the best way to get in touch is to email us at [archives@medway.gov.uk](mailto:archives@medway.gov.uk) or ring 01634 332714.



*Training*

### **Staffing**

We welcomed Eleanor [Cooke] to the service in October 2023. With a history background and experience of customer service, she has been a great addition to the team. She works as an archives assistant, and works at MAC at the latter part of each week.

In January 2024 we welcomed our new archivist, Sarah Trim-West, and her hearing dog Poppy. She is concentrating on tackling our cataloguing backlog and future-proofing the infrastructure of the archives.

Catharina Clement retired in April 2024. Our longest-serving member of staff, she will be sorely missed. We are fortunate though that she will be available as a casual member of staff when required. [See the article on page 6 for more details.]

This leaves us with an Archives Assistant vacancy, and we are in the middle of the recruitment process. We hope to have news about a new member of staff in the next edition of the *Clock Tower*.

## *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](mailto:editor@foma-lsc.org), the FOMA Secretary, Chris de Coulon Berthoud at [berthoud@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:berthoud@blueyonder.co.uk), or visit the FOMA website, [www.foma-lsc.org/index.htm](http://www.foma-lsc.org/index.htm) or our Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/fomalsc>*

### **Rochester's City Status**

26 February 2024

Dear Amanda,

I see from the latest *Clock Tower* that Alison [Thomas, MAC Archives Assistant] is working on a brief history of Medway Council and predecessor councils.

I hope that she will finally dispel the nonsensical tale about Rochester losing its city status because of an administrative error. It was a conscious and deliberate decision on the part of politicians, despite fair warning from the Lord Chancellor's Department, and I hope the letter written by Ron Gregory (the Chief Executive of RUMCC) to that department, making it clear that the necessary action would not be taken, is highlighted in Alison's work.

Yours sincerely,  
Robert Howe.

*Alison Thomas was sent a copy of Robert Howe's email message.*

### **Rochester High Street**

13 March 2024.

Hi Amanda,

Leonard Dormon's article in the latest edition of *The Clock Tower* about Rochester High Street jogged a few personal memories that you are welcome to publish. Interestingly Leonard was employed by my great uncle Edwin and there must be a good chance that Leonard is the young man in the photograph [see overleaf]. The photograph was taken in the early 1960s. You are welcome to forward the photos of Castle Garage to Leonard. Hopefully, they'll be a pleasant surprise for him.

Kind regards,  
Tony.

*The photographs were forwarded to Leonard Dormon and on page 31 you can read Tony's own fascinating account of Rochester High Street.*

It was important to sell something, and I became quite adept at it. To Mr Mortley's cry of, 'Forward, Miss Payne,' I approached the customer, or sometimes customers. You were expected to serve more than one at a time, so that they didn't have any excuse to escape. This was an art in itself that had to be learnt, because Mr Mortley said that by Christmas it would be 'black with people' who would all need attending to.

Attending to the customer's needs was paramount, as was achieving a sale. Stock had to be shown to the prospective buyer, sometimes a great deal of stock, before a decision was reached. It then all had to be carefully folded up and put away, usually on the highest, most inaccessible shelf from whence it came. Some clothes just required folding, but shirts were a different matter. They were folded in a special way and pinned back into position; no plastic clips then. This required some skill and a great deal of patience.

Having sold the goods, they were wrapped in the carefully folded reused paper, and tied up with the carefully rewound reused string. Tying a parcel was learnt early on. I found it quite complicated as I couldn't, and still can't, tie a shoelace in the conventional way. First of all, a loop was made in the string, which was placed around the middle of the parcel. The string was passed through the loop and pulled tight. It then went round the parcel the other way, being tied at the back, then finished at the front with a loop for the customer to hold.

Once the last customer had been served it was time to shut up shop. The dust sheets would be put over the displays, the blinds would be retracted, and finally the flood boards would be placed behind our department's door.

I have never forgotten my first job, in my first shop. There were to be more jobs, in more shops - but that's another story.



*A slightly blurry photograph of Janet and her father on Janet's wedding day. at St Paul's church (now demolished). A. E. Hawkins and Sons can be seen in the background.*

#### Notes

1. The building where A. E. Hawkins and Sons was situated still stands on the corner of Church Street and New Road and is now Payden's Chemist.

#### **Enquiries, Visitors and Research**

We offer an in-person service to customers, and although most of our visitors are local, we often have overseas visitors as well. Last year, we helped 2,000 visitors research the history, people and places of Medway, and we facilitated over 2,000 hours of research! This involved the team retrieving over 1,300 original archive documents from the strongroom, and almost 3,000 maps, books, photographs and other items from our Local Studies Collections.

Staff need to develop a specialised knowledge of our local history, as well as an in-depth knowledge of our collections. As well as helping visitors to our centre, did you know we also replied to nearly 900 enquiries last year? We also offer a paid research service for those who cannot visit us.

#### **Care for the Collections**

As you'll be aware, Medway Archives Centre staff are responsible for caring for and preserving a large collection of irreplaceable documents. This responsibility means we need to be prepared to manage any incidents that could potentially cause harm to the collections.

As part of the preparations for our emergency planning, Rachel Wales of Harwell Restoration came to MAC and led a day's training (pictured, opposite). This was an important day for us, and we welcomed the chance to meet Rachel and benefit from her skills and knowledge both as a Harwell Restoration consultant but also as an Accredited Conservator.

#### **Events and Exhibitions**

We have had a full schedule of events and outreach this past year, and you might like to see some statistics - we're very proud of how much we have achieved, especially as we are a small team, and these events are run alongside our public searchroom and historic research.

Five exhibitions; ten drop-in sessions; three craft sessions; six lectures; one schools' outreach session; one history trail; 20 behind-the-scenes tours; five reminiscence sessions; three collaborative projects with other providers, and five other events.

It isn't possible to mention them all, but here are some highlights. We ran two drop-in sessions to celebrate the Coronation of King Charles III. We displayed a selection of our charters, which are rarely seen, many with their seals still attached. We also had a visit from KMTV who took some footage of the centre and the event, and interviewed Will [Train] and Emma [Ovenden], and we were fortunate enough to have Len [Feist] here as a customer, who gave a fantastic impromptu interview too!

*Medway's Heroes in Time* is a Medway wide collaborative project involving schools, local history groups, ethnicity forums and the general public. We researched the individuals listed, creating packs of resources, and the public and a number of Medway schools will be using these over the coming academic years.

For Heritage Open Days, Medway Archives Centre offered free one hour sessions to help beginners start their family tree. With staff and our volunteer Brenda [Paternoster], customers were shown how to research their ancestors and learnt more about the resources here at MAC.

We were thrilled to be invited to the Rochester Art Gallery to run a Short Brothers Reminiscence drop-in. It was great to hear so many interesting memories, and collect some written stories for our collection.

Medway History Showcase. This regular event at the Royal Engineers Museum is a great opportunity for us to promote Medway Archives Centre, and we took part in a panel with Kent Archives to discuss access to archives.

Our *Marvellous Maps* event was fully booked. 7 to 10 year olds were inspired by some of our special maps and had fun creating their own maps to take home.

*Their Finest Hour* was an Oxford University led project, aiming to capture stories, objects and artefacts from the second world war before they're lost to history. We ran a digital collection day at Medway Archives Centre, one of only three locations in Kent to take part in this project. We look forward to the Oxford University official launch of this project on 6 June 2024.

It was great to offer our volunteers a special 'thank you' event. With plenty of refreshments, we watched a slide presentation of all our volunteer projects, together with a chance to see how paper conservation can ensure the longevity of our documents. There was also a chance to see a demonstration of our catalogue. We hope everyone had a good time!

The election of committee members was undertaken by FOMA Vice President, Sue Haydock (pictured). All committee members were returned to their posts and Ian Smith was unanimously voted onto the committee as new Membership Secretary.

Following the AGM, tea, coffee and cakes were served (see page 47) and there was also a free raffle!



Photograph by Amanda Thomas.

You had to be quite versatile to be a shop assistant in those days. Skills as a needlewoman, cleaner, designer and psychologist were all required. It wasn't just a question of stacking shelves or operating a till. Expertise in stock control was necessary. Records were kept as to what was sold, to ascertain what needed reordering. There were no computers, no barcodes, and no central ordering. It was all down to the assistant to keep her department replenished.

The art of cleaning, dusting and polishing had to be learnt. Windolene was applied to the glass counters on a regular basis. The floors were swept every morning, and the boxes that the stock was kept in had to be dust free. These boxes were piled quite high, so climbing was another required skill. The displays were hung on poles, and in my case on models of the male form, which had to be changed regularly. Knowing just where to place a safety pin came in very handy. Colour coordination was a useful skill, as was how to carefully arrange a shirt or woolly on a stand.

Window dressing was quite complex. In our shop an example of everything we sold was placed in the window. Apparently, if it wasn't in the window a prospective customer might think that we did not sell it and would go somewhere that did. As we always sold the same things, it took a bit of imagination to ring the changes. Under the artistic direction of Mr Mortley, the new window took shape, the old window goods having been carefully refolded and put back with the rest of the goods. Calls for price tickets filled the air, which I dutifully supplied. Cries for dressmaker's pins were also heard, and again found. These Mr Mortley ran through his greasy hair, which acted as a lubricant, enabling the pins to go through heavy stubborn 1960s materials.

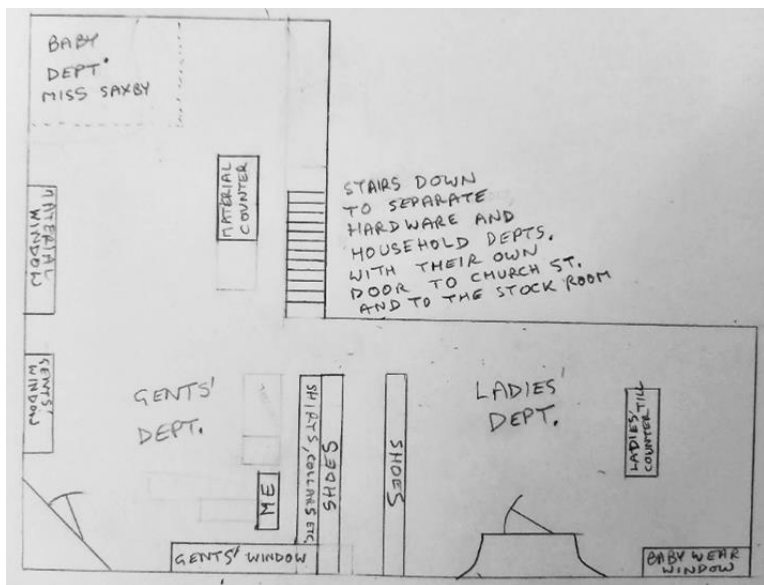
The clothes displayed were old fashioned, even for the times. The shop itself was reminiscent of the Edwardian era. That was until the refit! The floorboards were covered with vinyl linoleum, which came from the hardware department, possibly a slow-selling line. Whether it was the same roll that Hendy, the old retainer, managed to get rolled up in, we shall never know. For an entire lunchtime, while her assistant was away, she stood motionless inside the roll, frightened to move in case it tumbled with her inside it, perhaps crashing down, and causing all the other rolls to fall like ninepins. Fortunately, Mr Jack was passing through the department, and heard her cries. Mr Jack didn't appear very often, so this was indeed timely. How he got her out, I don't know, and when asked how she got stuck in the first place, she said she was measuring it.

As well as new flooring, the refit saw the building of two dual purpose booths. These were to act as offices, one for Mr Jack (who inherited the store from his mother), and the other for Mr Mortley. They were also to double as changing rooms for the poor unsuspecting male, who often must have wondered how on earth he had ended up there! He had probably been deafened by Mr Mortley, suggesting loudly that this or that would be just his style. Whether this item was what he came in for is debateable, but hardly anyone went out without a purchase of some sort.

Shop keeping was so different in the 1960s drapery. Even then there were few of this type of shop left. Nothing was wasted, everything possible was recycled. Paper from parcels was saved to wrap the customers' goods. String was saved from incoming parcels. It was carefully rewound and reused on purchases.

You also had to be good at sewing. French knots were all the go, as every price ticket had to be sewn onto the garments. Many afternoons, in between keeping the stock clean and tidy, and topped up, were spent sewing.

It seemed like a lifetime before I was allowed to serve the public. The manager would hover behind you like a ventriloquist, whispering the words you were to say. I wanted to use my own words. We were also advised to shout, and thus bamboozle the deafened, unsuspecting customers into buying something. After all, we were experienced drapers, and obviously knew best what the customer wanted!



Janet's plan of A.E Hawkins and Sons drapery shop from memory.

I was allowed to go solo at the age of 15¼, and soon had an underling to teach. Her name was Kate, and she was terrified of the customers. She was more than happy to let me serve her customers, which I didn't mind, but the manager did. We also had a good laugh about the woman who came in every single week to buy vests. What she did with them all, we didn't know, but we were in fits of laughter making up things. We used to see her coming down the road opposite and would start our guessing. How many would she buy this week? What had happened to last week's? Had she ruined them in the boil wash? So we went on, until I had a job to serve her and keep a straight face. Soon after this, Kate and I were separated! Word even got back to my father, who knew the manager. They met at the Masons, which is how I got the job in the first place.

## The Curels – Thames Sailing Barge Builders

David George



David was born in Ilford, Essex. As a youngster, he enjoyed many holidays with an aunt and uncle who lived in Bush Road, Cuxton and regularly visited Rochester and Chatham, blissfully unaware that ancestors on his father's side had strong Medway roots. He migrated to Australia in 1974 and today lives between Canberra and Moruya Heads, a sleepy hamlet on the south coast of New South Wales.

This article is a condensed version of David's book, *The Curels – Thames Sailing Barge Builders*, a copy of which has been donated to the Medway Archives Centre. Some parts of this article were included in the Society for Sailing Barge Research's publication *Topsail* (No 56).

My late father, Arthur George, benefitted greatly from family history research undertaken on his behalf by former FOMA Chairman Tessa Towner. Tessa helped research several branches of our family, but her real interest was in the Curel family who originated from Norfolk but established themselves in the Frindsbury/Strood area in the early nineteenth century.

My father knew that his grandfather, John Frederick Curel, had built sailing barges at Piper's on the Thames at Greenwich in the 1890s. He also knew that one of these was *SB Giralda* – widely acknowledged as the most famous sailing barge ever designed and built.

But Tessa's research helped unearth a rich history of barge building by the Curels on the Medway dating back to the 1820s, and it is from her work and my father's early research that I have been able to piece together a picture of their shipyards, their vessels and their legacy.

Shipbuilding on the Medway during the eighteenth century was centred at the Royal Naval Dockyards at Chatham. But such was the demand for ships during the wars with France that additional ship yards were established upstream. One of these was the Quarry House Yard, located in the north west of what is now the Medway City Estate. Early tenants of this yard were shipbuilders Edward Greaves and Nicholson (from 1745) and the Brindley Brothers (from 1794) - both these firms were private contractors who built many ships for the Royal Navy.



Greaves and Nicholson built one of the more renowned ships of the era, the 74-gun frigate HMS *Bellerophon* at the Quarry House Yard in 1786. This ship, known affectionately in the King's Navy as the *Billy Ruffian*, fought at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805 and it was on her that Napoleon formally surrendered following his defeat by Wellington at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815.



*Drawing of HMS Bellerophon prior to its launch from the Quarry House Yard in 1786. Image: Anonymous, Wikipedia.*

Following the Napoleonic wars, the need for warships declined while demand for smaller more agile sailing barges was ramping up. The Brindley Brothers went bankrupt in 1826 and this is when John Curel (b1778) moved his family from Norfolk to Frindsbury after acquiring the lease to the Quarry Yard.

What craft John Curel built during his early years at the yard is not recorded, but he may well have been the first barge builder on the Medway. His first recorded launch – that of *SB John* - took place in 1841. Around that time, the Quarry Yard became known as the Curel's Lower Yard and John was running the business with his son James Curel (b1801) and later with James' son, George Henry Curel (b1839), who was my Third Great Uncle.

George Henry took over the yard after his father died in 1868. Over the next few years, the demand for barges soared so George expanded the business by leasing an additional shipbuilding yard further upstream in 1877. This became known as the Curel's Upper Yard and was located adjacent to the Railway Tavern in Canal Road, Strood. The Railway Tavern building still stands but today is home to the Boat House restaurant.

## *Forward, Miss Payne*

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.*

*This is the story of Janet's first real job in 'junior sales' in a 1960s drapers' shop. It was first published in the magazine, This England (Winter 2016 pp 54-5) under the title, Junior Sales.*

'Fetch the brooms,' a voice boomed down the stairway. We were downstairs in the old servants' quarters. It was my first day as *Junior Sales* at A. E. Hawkins and Sons.<sup>1</sup> I was shown where to find my broom, and dutifully followed the other assistants upstairs to the new world of work.

I was to work in menswear, selling vests, pants, socks and other items for the discerning male. Fortunately, trousers, suits, jackets and hats fell under the direction of Mr Mortley, the manager, and his experienced assistant! I had my work cut out learning all the different types of vest. There were string, aertex, interlock and cellular, to name but a few. There was a similar confusing range of pants, together with odd snippets of *useful* information for a sweet fifteen-year-old, such as the extra supporting nature of X-fronts as opposed to Y-fronts. Luckily the manager usually imparted such assurances to the customers, who were mostly female and didn't argue.

My very first task, on my very first morning, was to dust the shoe boxes. A lot of time went into cleaning the stock in those far off days. I knew I had to learn about the stock, so I peeped inside the boxes, and by the time I had finished, I had found a pair of shoes that fitted my face, as my gran would say. My first week's wages were nearly spent! I had to give my mother £1, with another pound earmarked for clothes (my mother made my navy-blue work dress). I had to save £1, which left 10 shillings pocket money. As there was a sweet shop next door, 10/- didn't last long.

I came into my own at Easter. There was an Easter egg raffle for about three weeks beforehand. I bought so many tickets to satisfy my sweet tooth, that I won first prize in the first week, second prize in the next, and third prize in the final week.

I've always had an interest in motorcycles and can remember standing in awe looking through the window of Chambers' at a new Honda CB750 resplendent in its metallic gold paint scheme and four exhaust pipes. The machine was released in 1969 so I must have only been eight or nine years old, but I knew that it was nothing like the twin cylinder machines that were common at the time. A few years later, my father bought me a second hand BSA bicycle with 26-inch wheels. I hadn't had it long when it was run over by an army lorry when the Royal Engineers were building the Scout hut in Borstal. My pals had to cycle home but I was given a lift home in the back of the Bedford army lorry. The Royal Engineers agreed to pay for the damage and my father took the mangled bicycle to Chambers' for a repair estimate as he knew Len Chambers. The BSA was beyond economical repair, and I ended up with a brand-new bike; an Elswick Hopper that had tyres with white walls.

As you walked towards the bridge there was a shop on the same side as The Royal Victoria Bull Hotel which sold stamps and coins to collectors. It always appeared to be shut. In later years it may have become SuperGlaze. I can remember a shoe shop at 8 High Street. Was this the Robey's to which Leonard refers? There was a barber's next door at number 6. Years later during my youth I would sometimes frequent the hall above The Crown pub as it had bands on a Friday evening.

Leonard stated that Rochester High Street satisfied the needs of all shoppers. In no particular order: General Post Office, a sub post office, newsagent's, greengrocer's, confectioner, baker's, pet supplies, fishing tackle, sports equipment, museum, optician, shoes, bicycle sales and repairs, car sales and repairs, motorcycle sales and repairs, pubs, cafes, restaurants, public library, draper's, department store, records, solicitors, estate agents, museum, recycling (second hand shops), banks, dry cleaners, electrical appliances, gas appliances, ironmongers, tools.

He was quite right – but have I missed anything?

*Frindsbury Peninsula around 1865. The 'Shipbuilding Yard' towards the top is Curel's Lower Yard. Curel's Upper Yard is just upstream to the right of 'Strood Pier'.*  
*Image: Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland*



<https://maps.nls.uk/index.html>



George's older brother James (b1826) had eleven children from two marriages and one of his sons, John Frederick Curel, was my great grandfather.

John Frederick was born in Kennington, London on 13 November 1853. When he turned fourteen, his father James packed him off to Frindsbury to undertake an apprenticeship as a shipwright and barge builder under the supervision of his grandfather, James and his uncle, George Henry. His original Indenture Certificate, dated 30 December 1867, remains in our family.

*John Frederick Curel. Image: author's collection.*

George Henry Curel had married twice – to Elizabeth Gray who died in 1879 aged 37, and then to Maria Wright who died in July 1895. George Henry died a few months later in that December. Neither marriage had produced children. At the time of his death, George was living at Cullen House, a substantial property in Weston Road, Strood.

Following George's death, the Curel Yards were bought by barge builders George and Ernest Gill who continued to trade as GH Curel & Co until May 1900 when they and other shareholders founded the London & Rochester Barge Co Ltd. This became known as the London & Rochester Trading Co in 1924.

The Quarry Yard site survived until 2015 when the two slipways and yard buildings were removed and the site redeveloped for warehousing and industry. Looking at the site today, it is hard to imagine that massive warships – yet alone sailing barges – were built and launched from the Medway’s muddy shores.

Between 1841 and 1895 the Curels launched over 130 wooden sailing barges ranging in size from 15 to over 80 tons. The sailing barge heyday came around 1900 when there were over 2,000 registered barges on the waterways of Britain. These craft plied the rivers, estuaries and coastal waters transporting building materials from quarries to factories and then to building sites. They also transported hay and straw from farms along the east coast to London for horse feed, and then returned with holds full of dung to be used as fertiliser.

The Curels were keen barge racers and entered many of their barges in annual sailing matches on both the Medway and the Thames, with much success. Well known Curel racing barges included *SBs Gundulph, Flower of Kent, Saucy Kent, Duchess of Kent, Undaunted* and *Anglo Dane*.

*Thames sailing barges moored at St Katherine Docks, London, 2022. Image: author's collection.*



By the First World War the decline in sailing barge use was well under way. This was due to a downturn in the demand for cement and bricks along with new and emerging modes of transport – including road, rail and motorised container shipping. By 1954 only 160 barges were still in trade. The remnants of a number of abandoned barges can be seen in many locations along the banks of the rivers, gradually being consumed by mud.

As for all the barges built by the Curels, only one, *SB Cygnet*, remains intact today. Built in 1881, *SB Cygnet* is at least ten years older than any wooden barge still afloat, and at just 15 tons, she is also the smallest sailing barge ever built. At the time of writing, she was listed for sale at an Essex boatyard as a ‘rebuild project’. Hopefully she will be sold and well cared for by her new owner.

|  |  |                            |                           |
|--|--|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>CRICKET</b>                               |  |                            |                           |
| Bats   | Grays sizes 3 & 4 from £9.45   | sizes 5 & 6 from £9.95     |                           |
|  | Harrow from £11.95   | Full Size £13.95 to £23.95 |                           |
| Slazenger                                    | size 3 from £7.20  | size 4 from £7.65          | size 5 from £8.15         |
|  | size 6 from £8.60  | Harrow from £9.25          | Full size £8.90 to £15.70 |
|  | Others sizes 3, 4 & 5  |                            | from £11.20               |
| Balls:                                       | Stoz   |                            | from 75p                  |
|  | 44oz   |                            | from 75p                  |
| Bating Legguards:                            | Boys, youths and mens.   |                            | from 14.25                |
| Bating Gloves:                               | Boys, youths and mens.   |                            | from £1.00                |
| Thigh Pads:                                  |  |                            | £1.50                     |
| Wicket Keeping Gloves:                       |  |                            | from £1.015               |
| Inner Gloves:                                |  |                            | from £1.30                |
| Umpires Coat:                                |  |                            | £5.60                     |
|  | Stumps, mallets, scorebooks, grips, linseed oil, etc., all in stock.   |                            |                           |
| Clothing:                                    | Page 7   | Footwear:                  | Page 9                    |
| Know The Game, Cricket                       |  |                            | 35p                       |
| <b>SWIMMING</b>                              |  |                            |                           |
| Equipment:                                   | Fins, 4 sizes, 2 models  | £2.20 to £4.75 per pr.     |                           |
|  | Masks, Junior and Senior   | from £1.35                 |                           |
|  | Snorkels   | from 80p                   |                           |
|  | Swim Caps, strapless, mens and ladies  | from 30p                   |                           |
|  | Swimsafe   | £2.99                      | Armband trainers £1.05    |
|  | Earplugs   | 35p pr.                    | nosclip                   |
|  | Anti-chlorine goggles  |                            | £1.20                     |
| Swim Wear:                                   | Girls suits, nylon 22"-30"   | from £1.50                 |                           |
|  | Boys square leg trunks, stretch nylon  | from £1.50                 |                           |
|  | Mens square leg trunks, stretch nylon  | from £2.50                 |                           |
| Speedo Competition Wear, several colours     |  | Girls from £2.90           |                           |
|  | Boys from £1.90  | Ladies from £3.00          |                           |
|  | Mens from £2.30  |                            |                           |
| Know The Game, Swimming                      |  |                            | 30p                       |
| Know The Game, Underwater Swimming           |  |                            | 35p                       |
| Know The Game, Life Saving                   |  |                            | 40p                       |
| <b>GOLF</b>                                  |  |                            |                           |
| Clubs:                                       | Wilson, Dunlop, Slazenger and St. Peter  |                            | from £3.20                |
| Putters:                                     |  |                            | £5.40 per doz.            |
| Balls:                                       | Dunlop 65 solid singly   |                            | £3.00 per doz.            |
|  | Dunlop Bogey solid singly  |                            | 64p per doz.              |
|  | Perforated plastic for practice sold singly  |                            | from 95p                  |
| Headcovers:                                  |  |                            | from £2.45                |
| Gloves:                                      | Boys: always several in stock  |                            | from £5.50                |
|  | Folding trolleys: £12.20 to £14.00   | Bag stands:                | £6.50                     |
|  | Umbrellas: £6.50   | Seat sticks:               | £6.50                     |
|  | Umbrellas: £2.40   | Ordon socks:               | £1.10                     |
|  | also shoe studs, grips, printer pads, ball cleaners, practice sets, tees, weatherproofing spray, putting improvers etc. etc. |                            |                           |
| Clothing, including proofed clothing, page 8 |  | Footwear page 8            | 40p                       |
| Know The Game, Golf                          |  |                            | 6                         |
| <b>KEEPING FIT</b>                           |  |                            |                           |
| Expanders:                                   | Junior £4.65   | Popular £5.45              | Sportman £5.80            |
|  | Clubman £7.70  | Muscleman £8.50            |                           |
| Ballworker                                   | £15.50   | Power man £8.35            | Home gym £11.00           |
| Indian Clubs:                                | total weight per pair, 1lb, 2lb & 3lb  |                            | Junior gym £4.45          |
|  |  |                            | from £1.50 pr.            |
| Bowing Gloves:                               | 3oz, 4oz, 6oz & 8oz  |                            | from £2.10 pr.            |
|  | also barbells, dumbbells, bars, weights 1lb to 50lb, wrist rollers, headharners, from boots, kettlebells, etc. etc.          |                            |                           |
| Leotards:                                    | Mens, S-M-L royal  |                            | £4.50                     |
|  | Ladies, 34"-38" black & emerald from £2.75   | colours to                 |                           |
|  | Girls, 28"-32" black & emerald from £2.50  | special order              |                           |
| Know The Game, Keep Fit                      |  |                            | 30p                       |
| <b>ARCHERY</b>                               |  |                            |                           |
| Dunston Bows:                                | Fibre glass, from 24lb to 34lb @ 26"   | Flat                       | £7.35                     |
|  |  | Recurve                    | £9.10                     |
|  | Fibre glass, from 24lb to 40lb @ 28"   | Flat                       | £10.15                    |
|  |  | Recurve                    | £12.25                    |
| Arrows:                                      | School, set of 8   |                            | £4.75                     |
|  | Fireby, set of 8   |                            | £6.90                     |
|  | Goldstrike, set of 8   |                            | £7.70                     |
| Crossbows:                                   | Barnett Wildcat, 75 lb to 150 lb   |                            | £37.50                    |
|  | also bow strings, bow sights, shooting tabs, arm guards, quivers, targets 48" targets and boxes to order.                    |                            |                           |
| Know The Game, Archery                       |  |                            | 40p                       |
| <b>LADIES and GIRLS WEAR</b>                 |  |                            |                           |
| Dresses:                                     | Good selection   |                            | from £5.50                |
| Skirts:                                      | Wrap-round kilt, 3 lengths, white  | 22"-32"                    | from £4.25                |
|  | Kilt, white trimmed blue or green  | 22"-32"                    | £5.80                     |
|  | Kilt, choice of 7 colours  | 24"-32"                    | from £3.75                |
|  | Terylene, all round pleats   | 24"-28"                    | £5.50                     |
|  | Panelled, concealed pleats, elastic belt   | 24"-28"                    | £5.90                     |
|  | Pleated centre panel, half belt trimmed in navy  | 24"-30"                    | £4.40                     |
|  | Box pleated, green trim round hem  | 24"-28"                    | £5.80                     |
|  | Other styles in stock  |                            | from £2.50                |
| Shirts:                                      | white, 2 button front, half sleeves or sleeveless  | 32"-42"                    | £4.20                     |
|  | Half-sleeve, v-neck, trimmed blue or green   |                            | £4.20                     |
|  | 2 button front, trimmed blue or green  |                            | £4.20                     |
|  | V-neck, sleeveless, trimmed blue   |                            | £4.20                     |
|  | Acutex, v-neck, half sleeve  | 28-36"                     | from £2.70                |
| <b>MENS and BOYS WEAR</b>                    |  |                            |                           |
| Shirts:                                      | Plain white  | 26"-48"                    | from £3.10                |
|  | White, blue or green trim  | 26"-42"                    | from £3.50                |
|  | Bowls or Cricket shirts  | from 12" collar from £3.60 |                           |
|  |  | 14"-17" collar from £4.10  |                           |
|  | Table tennis and casual wear   | 34"-44"                    | from £3.15                |
|  | Short sleeves, 12 plain colours  | 34"-38"                    | from £3.50                |
|  | as above with contrasting trim   | 34"-44"                    | from £4.75                |
| Shorts:                                      | Boys, white  | 34"-38"                    | from £2.50                |
|  | Mens, white  | 30"-40"                    | from £4.00                |
|  | Mens, coloured   | 28"-38"                    | from £4.00                |
| Trousers:                                    | Polyester/viscose, waist 30"-44", leg 20"-33"  |                            | from £5.00                |
|  | Polyester/cotton, waist 27"-31", boys  |                            | from £3.20                |

As Len said, the old leaning building on the corner of 2 Post Alley has had many occupiers over the years and I can remember visiting the premises regularly with my mother. She would always make a payment of some sort, but as a child I could never understand why she never received a product in return. I can only assume that she was paying a bill or the mortgage.

We would sometimes walk up Boley Hill to Castle Garage as my mother’s Auntie Joan was married to Edwin Brereton who Leonard referred to as William. A search of the records has revealed that Uncle Edwin was christened William. After his retirement, Edwin and Joan moved to Denbighshire. I was told that the Rolls Royce shown in the photograph on page 41 had previously been owned by Trice’s. The garage was demolished in 1968.

In Northgate was Hobday’s second-hand shop which was opened by Mr Hobday after he retired from the Army. His wife ran Hobday’s wool shop in Lordswood, and their son Peter was a friend of mine who started his career as a professional footballer with Gillingham FC, before continuing his career in Germany.



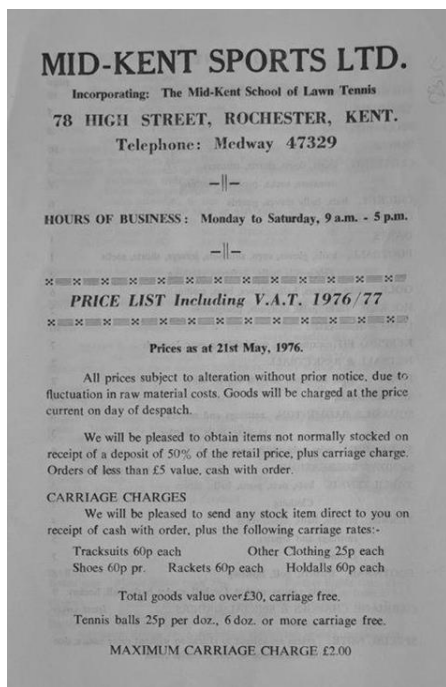
M & D bus to Strood, resplendent in a dark green and cream livery with a distinctive gold Maidstone and District signwriting.

Leonard Dormon mentioned Simes the animal feed store in his article. The shop also sold fishing tackle and, if my memory is correct, it may have sold tropical fish, goldfish and pond equipment too. What is now The Golden Lion I remember visiting regularly with my mother when it was the Trustee Savings Bank. Again, if my memory is correct the TSB didn't have as wide a frontage as the pub does these days.

Pendletons optician occupied what is now part of Morley's bakers. A Morley's doughnut was something special. They were twice the size they are now, much the same as Wagon Wheels! I recall an estate agent being next door adjacent to Eastgate House. We would pester our mother to visit the garden at the rear to look at the goldfish and Dickens' chalet. The pond may have been larger in those days.

On the other side of the road was Reeves china shop. Nowadays the premises is occupied by Holland & Barrett. Hind's jewellers occupied 98 High Street. My brother and I would look at the display in the window and try to find the highest priced item of jewellery. I was quite excited one day when I got my first watch. It was an Ingersoll with a distinctive nylon strap.

Like Leonard, I have fond memories of Caroline Records adjacent to the war memorial. I was also familiar with Mid Kent Sports on the other side of the memorial for which I still have a price list from 1976 (pictured). The only other sports shop that I can remember was Doughty's at the Chatham end of Rochester High Street, a few doors along from JP Knight's that always had fantastic models of their tugs in the window. Across the road from Caroline Records was Lane's toy shop that had a model railway in the front window. We'd pester our mother for a penny (it may have been a halfpenny) to drop through a slot in the windowsill which would put the train in motion.



*Right and opposite: the Mid Kent Sports' price list. Photograph Tony Gray.*

By 1895, John Frederick Curel (then known as Jack) and his family had moved to Greenwich and was working as foreman for Piper's Barge Builders on the Thames. They lived at 89 Old Woolwich Road where my father was born in 1925. Piper's was a well-known name on the riverside and by 1900 was one of the largest barge builders in the region. Jack Curel was the brains behind the unorthodox design of *SB Giralda* which was launched in 1897 and that year accomplished her task of winning the Gold Cup in the championship barge race on the Thames to celebrate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee.

John Frederick Curel died in Greenwich on 23 November 1924, aged 71. He is buried at Charlton Cemetery. George Henry Curel, along with his two wives Elizabeth and Maria and John Frederick's first wife Flora Ann, are all buried at All Saints' Church in Frindsbury. George's grave was positioned overlooking the river. Other Curels buried there include James Curel, his wife Christiana, his second son John Alexander and his granddaughter Charlotte Mary Anne along with William Richard and his wife Elizabeth. There may be others, but many headstones are illegible.



*The Medway present day (2022). The Boathouse Restaurant is to the left, Curel's Upper Yard was near the wrecked boat, Curel's Lower Yard was downstream just around the bend. Image: author's collection.*

## Rochester Bridge in Times of Modern Conflict

Ray Harris



A FOMA member born in Strood, Ray is a History graduate of Cambridge University. He previously worked in rail for the Strategic Rail Authority and Department for Transport, after 14 years with Kent County Council (chiefly Education Statistics). A member of Rochester Bridge Trust since 2013, previous extensive voluntary involvements include being a senior Councillor on the Rochester-upon-Medway local authority, 20 years with the WEA (including a period as regional Chair), plus 15 years as a secondary school governor. A lifelong student of military history and former cricket umpire, Ray is an avid fan of Test and County Cricket.

The exhibition, Rochester Bridge in Times of Conflict can be viewed at the Bridge Chamber and Chapel on Wednesdays and Saturdays from 30 March until 31 July 2024; and from 18 September until 23 October 2024, 11am-4pm. The exhibition is free to view. For more information, see the back page and The Rochester Bridge Trust's website, <https://rbt.org.uk/>

### Part 1: 1600 to 1914

The first Rochester Bridge was built on instruction by Aulus Plautius, commander of the Roman army when the Romans finally decided to invade Britain in AD 43, after previous raids in 55 and 54 BC. Over the following two millennia, Rochester Bridge has constituted a key strategic location as the only bridge for miles, spanning a wide (over 500 feet across), fast-flowing, tidal stretch over the lowest part of the River Medway between Rochester, Strood and the sea. Drawing on the Trust's historic Minute Books, this article seeks to link times of conflict since 1600 to notable milestones in the history of Rochester Bridge up to 1914, drawing out some physical, media, economic and human dimensions.

#### Rochester Bridge and the Second Civil War (1648)

The stone Medieval Bridge forms the backdrop to the Second Civil War. Built between 1387 and 1391 by our Founders Sir John de Cobham and Sir Robert Knolles, it and its successors have been maintained by Rochester Bridge Trust ever since.

## My Rochester High Street

Tony Gray



Tony was brought up in Rochester. His late parents were both from Strood; consequently, he is very familiar with the area. He was educated in Rochester before starting an apprenticeship in electrical engineering in 1977 with the CEGB. After a career in the power generation industry, Tony retired in 2021 which has given him the opportunity to spend more time with his grandchildren whilst pursuing a range of interests, one of which is FOMA, which he joined in 2018.

In Readers' Letters (page 39), you can read the exchange between Tony Gray and Leonard Dormon regarding their memories of the Castle Garage.

Reading Leonard Dormon's article in the last issue of *The Clock Tower* (Issue 73, February 2024) brought back a few childhood memories for me. I was born in 1961 so my memories are probably from the mid-sixties onwards. I was brought up in Rochester and often walked through the High Street to Strood with my mother and younger brother; consequently, my memories follow the same route.

There was a large draper's shop in Victoria Street called Robert Wares. Their former premises became several houses, a conversion which is very noticeable as the brickwork hasn't weathered much over the years. As a small boy when I entered the shop their grandfather clock seemed to be ten feet tall! They had a system of overhead wires and pulleys over which payments would be made which fascinated me. The cashier sat in a booth in the corner. When a purchase was made the payment was placed in a tube attached to the wires which was then sent from the respective counter to the cashier. The cashier then sent the change and receipt back to the counter for the assistant to give to the purchaser.

I can remember Barclays Bank being built at the junction with Star Hill which seemed huge when it was completed. There was a roundabout at this junction and several buildings were demolished when the road was widened. One of these buildings was a carpet shop next to Capons. I can remember it because my parents purchased a new lounge carpet that was too short when the shop fitted it. To amend their error the shop fitted a strip of carpet to fill the gap and my father wasn't impressed. I was with him when he visited the shop to voice his displeasure!

As you entered the High Street (at Eastgate) there was a line of bus stops outside the South Eastern Electricity Board (SEEBOARD) opposite the GPO (General Post Office). In those days traffic flowed from Star Hill towards the bridge, and traffic coming from Strood used Corporation Street. Sometimes we would board the 141





Painting entitled, Chatham Royal Dockyard by Nicholas Pocock of the 100-gun 1<sup>st</sup> rate Royal George on the River Medway in 1790 (on the right fitting out at Sun Pier). She was built at Chatham and launched in 1788: John Grant served on her between 1811 and 1814 on the Mediterranean Station. Image licensed for use from the Government Art Collection, GAC2007.

#### Notes

1. The National Archives, ADM 1/416, N132.
2. *New Edition*, v.5, 1902, pp.208-9.

The First Civil War (1642-45) left Rochester Bridge untouched. However, the Second Civil War (1648), with Royalists rebelling in Kent against Parliamentary forces, saw a brief, but major local clash at Rochester on 2 June 1648. The battle is described as ‘Bloody News from Rochester and Maidstone’,<sup>1</sup> a contemporary compilation in a vast mid-seventeenth century archive of some 22,000 publications, *The Thomason Tracts*, digitally accessible within the British Library:

Using the River Medway as a strategic position, the Royalists resolved to make a stand at Rochester, fortifying the river with stakes against cavalry, positioning four cannon close to the foot of the bridge, with an additional 40 cannon close by. The battle itself resulted in the Parliamentary side losing some 500 men, through the shelling of their position with case-shot by the ships *Rainbow* and *Swallow*, with Royalists suffering heavy losses. The Bridge was damaged, chiefly through the casting of the wooden drawbridge into the Medway, preventing Sir Thomas Fairfax’s Parliamentary troops pursuing General Hales’ Royalist forces across the Bridge as they retreated.

The recycling and reuse of materials is far from being a modern phenomenon. The Rochester Bridge Trust account books record the payment of 1 shilling and sixpence to: ‘... two men for saving the planckes of the draw bridge which were thrown into the River by soldiers’.<sup>2</sup> A considerable sum for 1648 against then-annual incomes!

Conflict often has other aftermaths. This was the case with the Trust’s membership during the Civil Wars of the 1640s and into the 1650s becoming almost entirely Parliamentary, including three Colonels and a Major. Restoration of the monarchy in 1660 saw the purging of the entire Trust membership on 26 April 1661, with all fourteen parliamentary wardens and assistants replaced with Royalists, extending this to ‘long-serving members such as George Duke (on the Trust 1638-1660), and where preceding members of the Duke family had served continuously as bridge wardens since 1587.’<sup>3</sup>

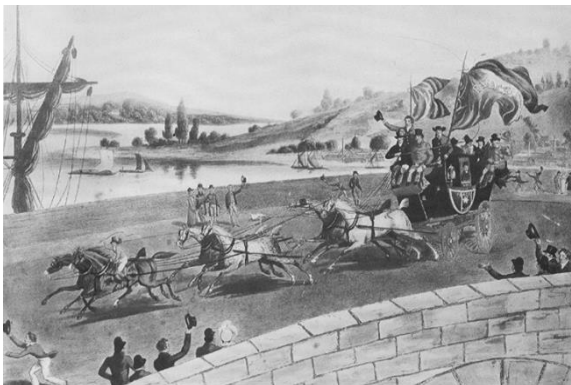
#### French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars – Rochester Bridge and the End of Conflict, plus the Nineteenth Century

Virtually continuous war with France between 1793 and 1815 saw military action all over Europe, from Spain to Prussia, Austria and Russia, with littoral naval activity ranging from the West Indies to the Nile in Egypt. Whilst Britain was committed to land and sea campaigns abroad, at home it escaped direct military consequences of continental land conflict.

Rochester Bridge itself became part of a most notable event when, at the end of the conflict, the famous Peace Coach (pictured overleaf) passed across it, carrying the *definitive* dispatch from Wellington, conveying news of the Allied victory against the French at Waterloo on Sunday 18 June 1815 and, finally, the end of war with France. Given the national importance of this and the hunger for news by the media of the day from whatever sources were available (including those from often

inaccurate hearsay!), Wellington's dispatch was intended to be carried in a suitable manner from Belgium to London, to enable the government to issue such news *officially*.

The thorough (over 2000 words!) dispatch left Ostend aboard the fast sloop HMS *Peruvian* on Tuesday 20 June 1815 at 2.00 p.m., entrusted to Wellington's only unwounded aide, Captain The Hon. Henry Percy of the 14<sup>th</sup> Dragoons, accorded the temporary rank of Major. HMS *Peruvian* should have taken five hours to sail to Kent...alas, it was becalmed by a total lack of suitable winds, resulting in a lengthy delay and the need for the ship's captain, James Kearney White to launch the ship's gig, rowing ashore with Percy and six men, landing at the North Foreland at Broadstairs, some 25 hours later. At last, the dispatch was ashore, together with two French eagles captured at Waterloo. The chase was on, with Percy and White hiring a post-chaise carriage pulled by four horses, they set off towards London.



*Peace Coach going over the Medieval Rochester Bridge; Rochester Bridge Trust.*

Despite this being a distance of only 75 miles, coach journeys in early nineteenth century England didn't have any of the benefits of modern transportation systems, or even metalled roads. Not unlike a present-day rail journey on

Southeastern, this commuter journey had several essential stops, necessitated by the need to change over motive power. Teams of horses were changed at coaching inns, the rail junctions of their day, four times at each of Canterbury, Sittingbourne, Rochester and Dartford. Attempts to make the journey as quickly as possible were subsequently further hampered by the early nineteenth century version of Network Rail, with tolls being collected by turnpikes no fewer than five times en route!

Finally, Wellington's dispatch reached London between 10pm and 11pm, delivered to the Prince Regent, George (later George IV, r1820-1830). This was later than anticipated, as the Prime Minister, Lord Liverpool and the Secretary for War and The Colonies, Lord Bathurst were not where they should have been. The entire Cabinet had been summoned at short notice so that George's limited functions as Regent could be seen to be exercised, but necessary to secure a loan of £36 million from City financiers to enable prosecution of the war against France.

Wellington's dispatch put an end to the hearsay originating from *unofficial* unconfirmed reports (which had arrived with more *despatch* than Wellington's), some speculating that Wellington had lost. On-the-basis of good intelligence sources, the contemporary financier Rothschild certainly speculated more

Collingwood's role in the Battle of Trafalgar had made him a national hero and, on the return of his body to England, he was carried in a barge up the River Thames to Greenwich where he lay in state for two weeks. Collingwood was then taken to St Paul's Cathedral where he was buried next to Nelson.

In August 1810 Rear Admiral Francis Pickmore, now senior Commander at Cadiz, transferred his flag to the *Temeraire* and in October sailed to the Mediterranean where, in August 1811, John Grant came under fire a second time.

In his celebrated *History of the Royal Navy*, W M James relates the following:

On the 7<sup>th</sup> of August the British Fleet came to anchor in the Bay of Hyeres, out of gunshot of the batteries leaving a line of battle ship and two or three frigates as a squadron of observation off Cape Sicie. ... On the 13<sup>th</sup>, while the British fleet was getting underway in very light winds, the *Temeraire* drifted near to the battery at Pointe des Medes. Instantly the battery opened fire upon her; which was returned by the *Temeraire*, as well as by the *Caledonia*, who was also within gunshot. By the aid of their boats, both ships got out of reach of the battery; but not until some shots had struck them, particularly the *Temeraire*, who had one of her main deck gun-carriages disabled, and her master, Mr Robert Duncan, severely, and three seamen slightly wounded. A shot from her, or from the *Caledonia*, had also wounded two men in the French battery. The noise of the firing brought out M. Emeriau with 14 sail of the line, and furnished the [newspaper] *Moniteur* [in Paris] with another paragraph, to prove the fearlessness with which the French fleet could manoeuvre within a league or two of its own port.<sup>2</sup>

On 24 December 1811 John Grant was transferred from the 2nd rate *Temeraire* to the 1st rate *Royal George*. He stayed on her in the Mediterranean until July 1814 when his 'afloat' service record ends.

In 1838, on the melancholy occasion of the *Temeraire* being towed up the River Thames to her last berth at Rotherhithe to be broken up, the Royal Academician J. M. W. Turner saw her and the idea for his celebrated picture, *Fighting Temeraire*, came to him. The painting is now in the National Gallery, London.

There will be more on John in the next issue discussing his dockyard *ashore* career from 1816 to 1828.

Hearing the guns of the British squadron fire in anger against the French may have been John Grant's first direct experience of war. In July 1810 after four months at Cadiz the *Temeraire* received orders to go to the Mediterranean but one further event is worth recording here. The arrival at Cadiz in March 1810 of the 110-gun 1<sup>st</sup> rate *Ville de Paris*, carrying the body of the Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Fleet, Admiral Cuthbert Collingwood. Seeing that ship approaching must have stirred the sailors on the *Temeraire* knowing that he had once commanded the ship they were on!

Collingwood's health had been deteriorating. By 1810 he had not been back to England for seven years and he had not seen his wife and children since June 1803, nearly eight years earlier. His requests to return were turned down as the Admiralty had no one with his vast knowledge, experience and stature to replace him in the Mediterranean. He departed Port Mahon in the Mediterranean a sick man but never made it home. The following is an extract from a letter by Admiral John Child Purvis at Cadiz to the Admiralty<sup>1</sup>:

*Atlas*, Cadiz Harbour, 30 March 1810.

Sir,

*It is with the greatest sorrow I am to acquaint you for their Lordship's information that my late valuable friend Lord Collingwood died on the 7<sup>th</sup> inst. On the 24<sup>th</sup> ult, his Lordship finding his health fast declining he parted from the fleet and went to Mahon but not finding relief there he yielded to the persuasion of the Medical Gen. Harman and determined to return to England in the Ville de Paris but survived only one day after leaving Mahon.*

*Captain Thomas of the Ville de Paris made the best of his way to this harbour and as Rear Admiral Pickmore is here and was intended by their Lordships to remain here I shall shift my Flag to the Ville de Paris and proceed to join the fleet at present under the order of Rear Admiral Sir Samuel Hood leaving with Rear Admiral Pickmore all such papers and instructions as are necessary for his guidance.*

*I have the honour to be, Sir, your most obedient humble servant,*

J C Purvis.



*The 110-gun 1<sup>st</sup> rate Ville de Paris painted by Thomas Butterworth. She was built at Chatham Dockyard and launched in 1795. John Grant had the experience of seeing her sail into Cadiz harbour in March 1810. NMM Greenwich, BHC2271.*

successfully than other news' speculators, which contributed to his making much of his fortune at this time.<sup>4</sup>

In the years which followed, Rochester Bridge underwent some considerable modernisation and refurbishment which was completed in 1824. The Medieval bridge was widened from 14 to 26 feet, two footways were added, and the 72 feet wide Great Arch was created.



*Photograph of Diamond damage; Rochester Bridge Trust.*

On 20 February 1896, the river lighter *Diamond* collided with the bridge (pictured above), severely damaging two girders of the central arch! Subsequent bridge collisions by *Ruby* and *Turquoise* on the Strood arch in March 1896 were followed by another heavy bridge bash by the concrete lighter *Spurn* in April 1907, damaging a girder.

The above *conflicts*, plus the substantial cost to remedy various other damage (such as defective or missing bolts in 916 places, and all iron cross-bracing requiring replacement with steel) led to the Trust's 1909 decision to fundamentally reconstruct Cubitt's bridge between 1910 and 1914.<sup>6</sup> This saw the installation of the current overhead bowstring-shaped trusses and the subsequent removal of Cubitt's iron arches from underneath the Bridge to facilitate the required headroom. This culminated in the grand, *in-house* reopening of the bridge by the Countess of Darnley (the Senior Warden's wife) on 14 May 1914. The nineteenth century certainly had a few bangs in it!

Part 2 will cover Rochester Bridge in the First World War.

### Notes

1. British Library *Thomason Tracts* E.446.36, 'Bloody Newes from Kent Being A Relation of the great Fight at Rochester and Maidstone ...'
2. Nigel Yates and James M Gibson *Traffic & Politics - The Construction and Management of Rochester Bridge AD 43 - 1993*, Boydell Press, 1994.
3. Yates and Gibson, *Traffic & Politics*.
4. For more on the Peace Coach and the media in times of war with France in the era of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, see Brian Cathcart, *The News From Waterloo - The Race To Tell Britain of Wellington's Victory*, Faber & Faber, 2015.
5. Yates and Gibson, *Traffic & Politics*.
6. Yates and Gibson, *Traffic & Politics*.

## 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 Two: A Way Forward

Once the announcement was made in 1981 that the Dockyard was to close, managers and local authorities within the Medway area, together with Kent County Council and Central Government, commissioned reports on the many impacts which the closure would have upon Chatham, Gillingham, Rochester and the surrounding neighbourhoods. The prospect of losing a major employer and the attendant reduction in business for the many companies who were reliant on the presence of the Navy and its Dockyard led to frightening predictions about the subsequent levels of unemployment. At a time of nationwide de-industrialisation there was little prospect of private industry and engineering firms taking up the slack. Attracting new types of employment into Medway was going to be tough but imperative. An official report in 1982 stated that the workforce in the Dockyard numbered 7,200 comprising 2,260 non-industrials and 4,940 industrials. It estimated that by the time of closure in 1984 a proportion of these would have transferred to other Naval yards like Portsmouth or Devonport or to industries or businesses in the local area. It could not avoid an estimated 3,300 redundancies.

### *John Grant*

Peter Burse



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 Two:

### John Grant Serves on the Famous *Temeraire*, 1810-1811

In the previous issue I introduced my ancestor, John Grant (c1790-1863), who managed to get ashore when the *Venerable* was wrecked at Torbay during a storm in November 1804. That was already his second ship, and he was still only 14 years old the following month when he joined his next ship, the *St George*, where he remained for six years. Good fortune again favoured John for, the year after he left the *St George*, she went down with all hands off the Danish coast whilst on a return trip from the Baltic; only six sailors were saved. His next ship was the *Temeraire*, a 98-gun ship built at Chatham Dockyard and launched in 1798. When John was on her, between February 1810 and December 1811, she carried 496 sailors, 33 boys, 146 marines and 12 supernumeraries. After the *Victory*, the *Temeraire* was the most famous ship in the Royal Navy having been the flagship of Admiral Collingwood, second in command at the Battle of Trafalgar.

### The Battle for Cadiz

By March 1810 the *Temeraire* was at Cadiz in southern Spain under the command of Captain Edward S. Clay and Rear Admiral Manley Dixon. The Commander-in-Chief at Cadiz was Admiral John Purvis, and the Commander-in-Chief in the Mediterranean was Admiral Collingwood, hero of Trafalgar. The *Temeraire* arrived at Cadiz as part of a British squadron sent to protect the Spanish city - the British had control of the sea, but the besieging French had control of the land. Bad weather immediately forced the *Temeraire* to anchor close to shore alongside a Spanish prison hulk: ironically it was the *Neptune*, one of the French ships the *Temeraire* had fought against at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805, and now used to house French prisoners of war. Details of the *Temeraire*'s role during the four months she was at Cadiz can be found in Sam Willis' 2009 book, *The Fighting Temeraire*.

Many of the buildings on site now house units for businesses. These include the Joiner's shop, Anchor Wharf and the Admiral's offices. There are over 120 different companies on site ranging in size and in the type of work they do. They include Master Ropemakers, sign makers, a gaming company, a blacksmith, model makers, archive storage, security, ship repair, legal and architectural services, a foundry, wood carvers and sail makers. In 2024 Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust is run as a business with a corporate plan and subsidiaries to manage its different interests. It has around 140 staff but could not operate without its dedicated band of 300 volunteer stewards and researchers. Its objectives are clear: to preserve, engage, educate and entertain.



*HMS Gannet at the Historic Dockyard; Norma Crowe.*

## Conclusion

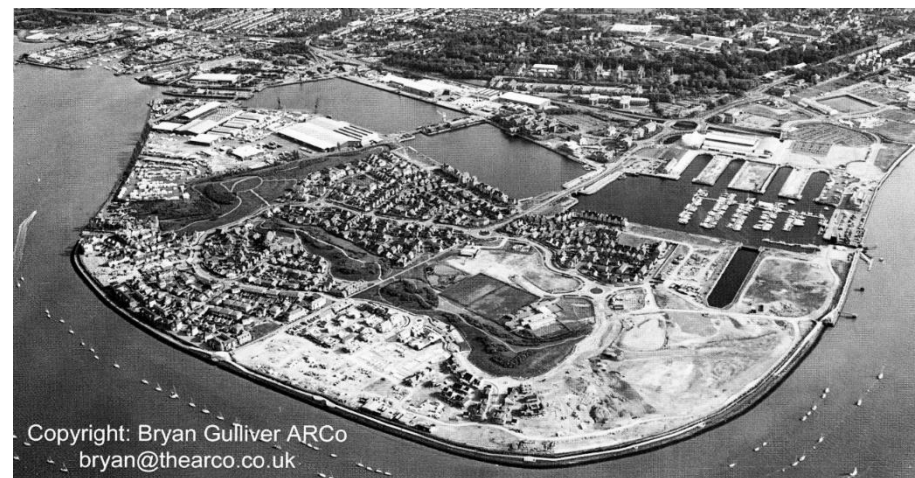
In 1981 the announcement of the closure of the Chatham Dockyard was viewed by many as a betrayal and a body blow from which the Medway Towns would struggle to recover. The identity of this area was built upon its proud industrial heritage and the ending of its 400 years' involvement with the Royal Navy left a void which has been hard to fill.

The decommissioning of the Dockyard took intricate and detailed planning and, to a large extent, the decisions taken from the start of the process have resulted in regeneration and sensible reuse of most of the land and historic buildings. The work of repurposing, regeneration and renewal continues and has brought new vitality to the former Dockyard area. But, as yet, it has not won the hearts and a sense of ownership to many Medway people. That may take another forty years.

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

The Medway local authorities were faced with a huge brownfield site in need of redevelopment in its midst. Support for the unemployed, the creation of new streams of work and the redevelopment of the former Dockyard extension site were the priorities. There were to be no quick fixes; it would take at least 12 years for some of the revival plans to take shape.

In March 1984 at the formal closure the Dockyard General Manager Alan Kettle handed over the keys padlocking Pembroke Gate. In a symbolic gesture he handed batons to the chief executives of the three distinct areas: Kenneth Cooper of the Medway Dock Company, Tony Pender of English Estates (which administered areas outside the historic yard and St. Mary's Island) and Sir Stuart Pringle of Chatham Dockyard Trust.



*St. Mary's Island, Chatham Maritime and the commercial docks. Reproduced with the kind permission of Bryan Gulliver.*

Redevelopment and re-use entailed the clearing of workshops, covered slips and other buildings and the scarification of polluted derelict land. It required new roads and access. The construction of the Medway Tunnel which opened in 1996 and the Medway Towns Northern relief road helped to open up possibilities. Certain buildings and features, such as the deep-water basins, were retained and used to enhance residential, retail, business, and leisure areas. There were major problems along the way, however. The apparently successful company, Thames Ship Repair Services was told it could not continue in No.1 Basin. Its working practices did not chime well with the plans English Estates was formulating of residential properties around a picturesque marina, and it ceased trading in 1985. This was blow to those who had hoped to preserve some of the expertise of former Dockyard shipbuilders and a low point on the journey to recovery for many. But now, forty years after the Dockyard closed, the plans for the areas outside the historic dockyard have largely been realised.



The area between the Historic Dockyard and St. Mary's Island has had a bit of a chequered history. During the late 1980s and 1990s private businesses, Kent County Council and Medway Unitary Authority took up residence in the new buildings including the Compass Centre situated adjacent to the former Naval Barracks and what was to be the entrance to the Medway Tunnel. Much of this area has now been taken over by the universities with some student accommodation on site. In 2007 *Dickens World* opened its doors, but it struggled for market share and since 2016 is permanently closed. The Dockyard Outlet Centre has grown from small beginnings and now boasts a cinema, a selection of retail units and restaurants. No 1 Basin is a lively marina. The commercial docks have changed ownership several times, currently (with Sheerness Docks) known as Port of London Medway, part of the Peel Ports Group.

## Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and the Royal Naval Barracks

The education sector has been a major player in the regeneration and reuse of historic buildings and sites within and around the Dockyard. Establishments offering both further and higher education have moved into abandoned areas. In 1990 the Tropical Development and Research Institute (TDRI), later renamed the Natural Resources Institute (NRI), moved into part of the Royal Naval Barracks. In 1996 the NRI became part of the University of Greenwich, which was the first of the three universities to move onto the site. The former HMS *Wildfire* and its adjacent site is now the campus for NW Kent College. Three universities now share resources on the site of the Royal Naval Barracks: University of Greenwich, Canterbury Christchurch University and the University of Kent. The influx of students living and studying in this part of Medway has brought it back to life and given it a new vibe.

Buildings within the Historic Dockyard are also used as university facilities. The University of Kent uses the Clocktower offices and has exciting plans to transform the sectional police house into the Docking Station. It took a lease of the former Dockyard Church and transformed it into a large lecture theatre, the management of which has now reverted to the Trust.

## The Historic Dockyard

In 1984 the Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust was founded with an initial grant of £11 Million to secure and renovate buildings and open the site to visitors, which it did in 1985. By 1996 this initial £11 million had dwindled to £1 million with major repairs still needed and no firm source of income from visitors. The accounting firm, KMPG was commissioned to produce a development revival strategy and this has formed the basis of Trust's activities ever since.

It was clear that:

- The site itself and its collective buildings and vessels were a unique type of museum and certain features could be enhanced as a visitor experience; (for example, stepping into an eighteenth century dockyard).
- Only a small percentage of the Dockyard's buildings would be open to the public as part of the museum.
- Other buildings on the site (around 100) should be repurposed, let to businesses for income generation.
- Some areas could be developed for residential occupation.

The Dockyard closed in 1984 and it really has taken all of 40 years since to realise the vision of those perceptive individuals who clamoured for the retention of the site and its unique industrial buildings. By the early 1980s large sections of the complex had already lost their purpose and were becoming derelict. It has been a difficult but ultimately worthwhile enterprise to renovate buildings and to bring abandoned areas back to life. Major achievements include the renovation of the Wheelwright's Shop, Mast House and Mould Loft, the Covered Slips, Anchor Wharf and storehouses, the Ropery, the Joiner's shop, Commissioner's House and No.1 Smithery.

Maintaining such a vast site and giving visitors a coherent and worthwhile experience is difficult. It requires stamina and time to walk from one end to the other. It is hard to convey how the site encompasses the industrial practices which were evolving over several centuries, but are all within close proximity. No one can hope to take in the whole site in one visit, so it is good that the entry ticket allows multiple returns within 12 months. The visitor experience has been enhanced and improved by the development of a number of themed galleries, and the new visitor entrance means that folk can gain an overview of the Dockyard before entering the main site. From there it is possible to choose any of the following: *Hearts of Oak*: Dockyard apprentice experience; *Command of the Oceans* including Namur timbers and HMS *Invincible* artefacts; *Steam, Steel and Submarines* gallery: Chatham Dockyard and the Navy in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries; *The Ropery*: ropemaking and the rope walk; *No.1 Smithery*: temporary exhibitions gallery and historic ship model collections; and the Dockyard Library and Archives.

Bringing actual ships – HMS *Gannet*, Submarine *Ocelot* and HMS *Cavalier* - to the dry docks has really helped to enhance the visitor experience. The use of the covered slip to display the RNLi's historic lifeboat collection is a great use of this incredible space and one which benefits both parties, and especially relevant for 2024 as the RNLi celebrates its 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

The site, its buildings and its ships have also been used as a location in many films and television programmes, giving a valuable revenue stream to the Trust. It has raised its profile with a wider audience by playing on its role in the popular drama *Call the Midwife*, with visitor location tours and a special gallery of period pieces linked to the series. Special event weekends, for example the annual *Salute to the Forties*, have also increased visitor revenue.