

## A History of British Concrete Ships

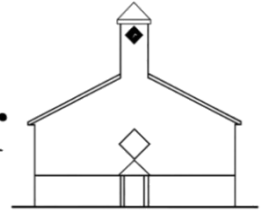
FOMA member Richard Lewis pictured alongside the *Cretegaff*, the last floating survivor of the WWI British 'Crete Fleet' that lies in Carlingford Marina. It was this vessel which first triggered Richard's interest in concrete ships.

On page 14 Richard begins a fascinating 'potted history' of British concrete shipbuilding and its Medway connections.



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

# The Clock Tower



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The Friends of Medway Archives  
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## Bringing History to the Local Community



Throughout the spring and summer, the Medway Archives Centre team have visited many areas around Medway to encourage local people to engage in our history. In June this included the Armed Forces Covenant Conference 2024, where Helen Worthy and Emma Ovenden (pictured left and right respectively) displayed resources relating to the forces and Brompton Barracks. See more on pages 6-8.

### ALSO INSIDE – ALL AT SEA!

In a celebration of summer, this issue has a distinct maritime feel. On page 14 read the first part of Richard Lewis's potted history of concrete ships, and on page 36 the final part of Peter Bursey's tale of his ancestor, John Grant and his time at Sheerness and Chatham.

## The Isaac Newell Statue – the Latest News

On page 13 Amanda Thomas gives a progress update on the project to remember one of Strood's greatest sons, Isaac Newell.



The inaugural Rochester and District Football League Isaac Newell Trophy Final was held at the end of May. Isaac Newell Heritage Group members Adrian, Jon and Sandra, (pictured above with Cllr. Vince Maple) were out in force to support this wonderful initiative.

*Above (from left to right): Adrian Pope, Cllr. Vince Maple (Leader of Medway Council), Jon Rye, Sandra Fowler; photographs thanks to Rob Flood.*

## John Grant at Sheerness and Chatham

On page 36 Peter Bursey concludes the extraordinary story of his ancestor, John Grant. Pictured are a couple of the wonderful illustrations he has sourced for this series of articles, and which are a wonderful addition to this maritime-themed issue!



*A vibrant etching of a 'Common Sailor' dated 1828, by Maxim Gauci; National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London, PAF4197.*



*Ships of War in the Medway off Sheerness, painted by Edward Cooke, 1833; Victoria and Albert Museum, London.*



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## *Chairman's Letter*

Elaine Gardner



Well, it seems to be another sunny day as I write this so I hope you have been enjoying the better weather and have had a chance to abandon the macs and brollies. You will also be pleased to hear that our FOMA Quiz Night in June was very successful and raised roughly £270 for funds to support the Medway Archives Centre (MAC). Hopefully we can organise another one towards the end of the year.

The staff at MAC have been busy organising some really interesting 'Pop-up' exhibitions on the first Saturday of the month (see Helen Worthy's report on pages 6 to 8 and also *News and Events* on pages 42 and 43). The first, on 3 August, featured the Medway Hulks and prisons, including the Borstal institute which started life in the 1860s as a convict prison – which the convicts had to build before they were imprisoned there! Local author Ralph Allison also attended this event, signing copies of his new book *Borstal: a History of Rochester Prison*.

The next drop-in session on 7 September (10am to 12 noon) will be about Will Adams, the seventeenth century seaman who became a Japanese Samuri. There is also currently a new exhibition in the foyer on the life of Thomas Aveling, as the bi-centenary of his birth is this August. You can view this during Archive opening hours (see page 43). Car parking at MAC has been an ongoing topic of discussion at FOMA committee meetings with Will Train, Medway Council's Library Service Manager. We are delighted, therefore, to report that it is now *much* easier to park when you visit MAC as the council has installed a barrier which is only open when the building is open. So a big "Thank you" to Medway Council!

Our next FOMA talk will be on 13 September, see page 42 for further details. Our speaker, Dr Monica Walker, is the new curator of Gallery 1885 at the Camera Club (a registered charity) and the Engagement Manager at the Old Operating Theatre Museum and Herb Garret at Guy's and St Thomas hospital in London. She is giving a talk entitled *Christina Broom: The Pioneering Woman Photojournalist of the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century*. Christina Broom broke barriers and established herself as a pioneering force in the predominantly male world of photojournalism. Often regarded as the UK's first female press photographer, Broom's remarkable career spanned from 1903 to 1939, during which she documented significant everyday events, but also some historical ones, such as the protests of the Suffragette movement. It sounds really interesting.

We are always delighted to hear from our Dutch friend (and FOMA Life Member) Henk van der Linden. You will recall FOMA's interest in Henk's quest to commemorate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the sinking of the three Royal Navy cruisers, HMS *Aboukir*, HMS *Hogue* and HMS *Cressy*, all torpedoed by a German U-boat on 22 September 1914 off the Dutch coast with a total loss of life of 1,459 men. FOMA's involvement with the story began with one of our founding members, Tessa Towner and her desire to help Henk discover more about the young men from Medway who were killed in those early days of World War One. Tessa's and Amanda Thomas' trips to Holland, which included Henk's presentation of the British Empire Medal, are all well documented in *The Clock Tower* between 2013 and 2017 (see the online Index). It is hard to believe ten years have passed since that first important anniversary and Henk has now organised with Chief Executive, Richard Morsley and his team at Chatham Historic Dockyard, a 110<sup>th</sup> commemoration event on the evening of 5 September. This will include a talk by author Stuart Heaver and a film presentation of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. More details can be found on page 5 and at <https://thedockyard.co.uk/events/in-conversation-with-live-bait-squadron-society-stuart-heaver/>

FOMA will also be once again attending the Medway History Showcase on 5 October hosted by the Royal Engineers Museum in Gillingham. We will be there with MAC and other local historical groups. Entrance is free if you pre-book with the museum and you can find details on the FOMA website, along with details of the other items mentioned above. As well as various stands from local groups there are a series of 30-minute talks throughout the day that you can listen to.

Enjoy what summer we have left - I always remember September appeared great just when schools had re-opened, and I was back in the classroom during my career as teacher. I also hope to meet some of you at these events.

\*\*\*

## New Members

A warm welcome to new FOMA members Susan Heels, Sarah and Paul Anderson, and new Life Member Diana Dodds

\*\*\*

## Dr Christopher de Coulon Berthoud

At the beginning of June, we were delighted to hear that after many years of hard work, FOMA Secretary Chris de Coulon Berthoud had received the news that the minor corrections to his thesis had been approved by his Internal Examiner and he was to be admitted to the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology. Huge congratulations!



## 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 76 of *The Clock Tower* is Monday 28 October 2024, with publication on Wednesday 20 November 2024.**

### Publication date

The fourth Wednesday following the editorial deadline.

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### Front Cover Accreditations and Website Information

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

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

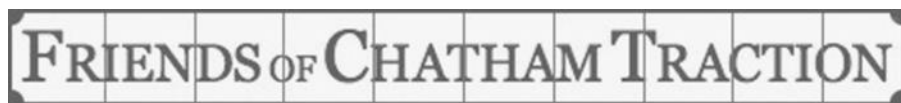
Membership enquiries should be directed to the Membership Secretary, Ian H. Smith, 40 Quixote Crescent, Frindsbury, Rochester, Kent, ME2 3XD; [membership@foma-lsc.org](mailto:membership@foma-lsc.org)

- 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.

## Kent Ship Building Conference

Thursday 7 and Friday 8 November  
Chatham Historic Dockyard

The conference is being run by the Kent Archaeological Society (KAS) in conjunction with Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust.  
For more information, and to book a place, please see the following link  
<https://thedockyard.co.uk/events/kent-shipbuilding-conference/>  
This is a great opportunity to find out more about Kent's rich shipbuilding heritage!



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)

## Ian Smith – Our New Membership Secretary



We were delighted earlier this year when Ian Smith volunteered to take over from Jean Skilling as Membership Secretary. Ian has a wealth of experience, as he is also Membership Secretary for the Kent Family History Society. Ian has always been interested in local history and has been a member of FOMA for many years. He is also involved with the City of Rochester Society and ran the Craft Fair in the castle grounds at Christmas for about 17 years.

Ian was born in Chatham in the early 50s and has been married to Rachel for nearly 50 years; they have two sons and four granddaughters. Ian's family is steeped in the Medway Towns and its history. One of his great grandfathers was a river policeman for the City of Rochester Police, another was a prison warden at the Borstal Institute, and a third who was a local businessman and City Councillor.

It is wonderful that the important role of Membership Secretary is in such safe hands!

\*\*\*

## The Live Bait Squadron Society

### Commemoration

Including a fascinating talk by author Stuart Heaver

Thursday 5 September 2024

The Mess Deck Restaurant

6.30pm for 7.00pm start

### BOOKING ESSENTIAL

The evening will mark the 110<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the sinking of the three Royal Navy cruisers - HMS *Aboukir*, HMS *Hogue* and HMS *Cressy* - sunk on 22 September 1914 off the Dutch coast with a total loss of life of 1,459 men.

Booking and further information:

In conversation with ... The Live Bait Squadron Society and Stuart Heaver - Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust ([thedockyard.co.uk](http://thedockyard.co.uk))

PLEASE ALSO CONFIRM BOOKING WITH HENK VAN DER LINDEN AT [h.van.der.linden@tip.nl](mailto:h.van.der.linden@tip.nl)

## Medway Archives Centre Report

Helen Worthy, Medway Archives Centre Manager



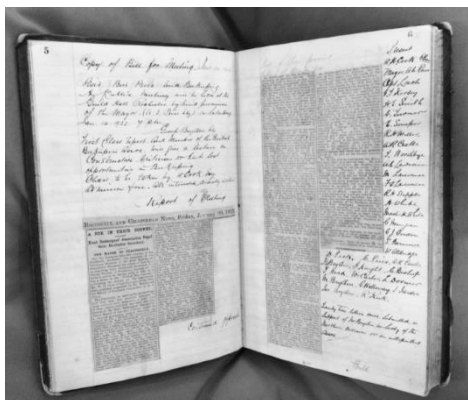
Hello everyone! We have had a busy time at Medway Archives Centre since our last update. The following is just a brief overview, so please do get in touch if you'd like to know more about the collections at Medway Archives Centre, our events and exhibitions, or about the services we offer.

### Staffing

We are looking forward to welcoming Natasha, our new Archives Assistant, to the team on 20 August 2024. If you are passing, please do pop in to say hello and introduce yourselves to her!

### Latest News

As well as providing our public in-person service at the centre, we have replied to hundreds of email enquiries and completed paid research for customers who cannot visit. We have received a number of deposits, including 22 boxes of documents from the parish of South Gillingham (Acc 1608) and three volumes of minutes from the Medway Beekeepers Association (Acc 1609). These and other recent deposits have been assessed for condition, and are then sorted, listed and packaged. Documents are then quarantined before being stored in our archives strongroom, and in time a full catalogue record is produced. Please be aware that some records will be 'closed' for GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) reasons and therefore these collections may not be available to researchers for a period of time. Please email us if you wish to view these records or learn more about our recent deposits.



Medway Beekeepers Association – minute book.

The theme for this year's Heritage Open Days is *routes, networks and connections*. Medway Archives Centre is holding a free drop-in about Medway's tunnels. Call in to find out more and discover the hidden history beneath our feet.

### Tea and Chat

Enjoy a cup of tea or coffee and biscuits and join us as we look at some old photos. Stay for the whole session (see below) or just pop by. It's free and there's no need to book:

Tuesday, 17 September from 2pm to 3.30pm.

*Fetes, carnivals and bank holidays*

Tuesday 1 October, 2pm to 3.30pm

*Travel and transport*

Tuesday 15 October, 2pm to 3.30pm

*A trip to the coast*

Tuesday 29 October, 2pm to 3.30pm

*Housecoats, overalls, gloves and things to keep us safe in our working and home lives*

Tuesday 12 November, 2pm to 3.30pm

*At the cinema*

Tuesday 26 November, 2pm to 3.30pm

*Hairdressers, barbers and getting a hair cut*

### 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 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](#).

## News and Events

### Calendar of Forthcoming Events and Exhibitions

## FOMA Talks and Events

Friday 13 September, 7.30 pm

*Christina Broom: The Pioneering Woman Photojournalist of the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century.*

A talk by Dr Monica Walker,

Curator of Gallery 1885 at the Camera Club and Engagement Manager at the Old Operating Theatre Museum and Herb Garret at Guy's and St Thomas hospital in London.

This will be a fascinating talk on how Christina Broom broke barriers and established herself as a pioneering force in the predominantly male world of photojournalism.

Booking for FOMA events is not necessary and unless specified are ALL held at St Nicholas Church Lower Hall, Strood, Rochester, Kent. ME2 4TR; car park entrance is off Gun Lane, ME2 4UG, almost opposite the Health Centre. Please check our website ([www.foma-lsc.org](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](mailto:emgardner@virginmedia.com); 01634 408595.

## Medway Archives Centre

32 Bryant Rd, Rochester ME2 3EP; 01634 332714; [malsc@medway.gov.uk](mailto:malsc@medway.gov.uk).

Exhibition

*Innovation and Steam, the Story of Aveling & Porter*

From Monday 5 August. Available during our normal opening hours.

Drop-in session

*Focus on ... Will Adams*

Saturday 7 September, 10am to 12noon

Drop-in session

*Focus on ... Medway's tunnels*

Wednesday 11 September, 10am to 12noon

**(please note this event is on a Wednesday)**

We are always actively engaged with the local community in Medway, and for this reason you may well have seen our exhibitions whilst out and about. When our Medway Archives Centre exhibitions are taken down, we offer them to Medway Libraries or elsewhere in the community. Our exhibition *Homeward bound: stories of Medway's historic ships* has been circulating in the libraries after a short spell at Strood Academy.

As many of you will be aware, our popular lecture series organised by Emma Ovenden came to an end in July. We had some great feedback from those who attended and want to thank everyone who generously gave a lecture. You can read more about the lectures in Emma's article on page 9.

Our Saturday drop-in sessions have continued. To celebrate Local and Community History Month in May (see page 11), we showcased our resources on Medway's wharves and piers. This was followed by our June session on Medway's many windmills and watermills, all sadly long gone. Finally, in July, we celebrated Medway's sporting past, including football, bat and trap, and even pram racing!

Recently we were pleased to host *The Ghost of Acorn*, a photographic exhibition about Acorn Wharf, produced by Luna Zsigo and Neil Thorne. In 2016, much of Acorn Shipyard in Rochester was destroyed by fire, but over the following year, Luna Zsigo and Neil Thorne captured thousands of photographs documenting the final chapter of its life.

In May, as part of Local and Community History Month, the team from Medway Archives Centre (MAC) hosted two drop-ins at Twydall Community Hub and Grain Library (see page 11). These events were an opportunity for us to reach out to communities in other parts of Medway, and it was a fantastic opportunity to promote our collections and the services we offer. We also ran our *Marvellous Maps* session, this time at Wigmore Library, where families could spend an enjoyable afternoon being inspired by some of our special maps and having fun creating their own map to take home.

On the 4 June, MAC had a stall at the Armed Forces Covenant Conference 2024, which was held at the Royal School of Military Engineering in Brompton. The theme for 2024 was *Working Together*. We had the opportunity to promote our services amongst the many delegates, which included representatives from institutions and charities that support military personnel, plus local schools and universities. Alongside our colleagues from Kent Archives, we took along resources relating to the forces and Brompton Barracks. This was a great opportunity to connect to new audiences, and there was lots of interest in our historic maps of Brompton Barracks, as well as items from our Naval Collection.

## Memories of the Dockyard

Medway Archives Centre was delighted to work in partnership with The Historic Dockyard Chatham to lead two afternoon reminiscence sessions as part of the Historic Dockyard's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The popular sessions, which took place on 19 June at MAC and 26 June at the Dockyard, gave people the chance to share their memories and family stories of working or visiting the Dockyard. MAC resources such as images, a map of the Dockyard from 1973, and an apprentice's notebook including hand-drawn diagrams, were used to jog peoples' memories. The free sessions were friendly and informal, and we received a lot of positive feedback – one attendee even asked if we did this every week!

### *Memories of the Dockyard in the foyer at MAC.*



We had a great week with two work experience students, Josh and Taylor from Sir Joseph Williamson's Mathematical School in Rochester. This partnership with MEBP (Medway Education Business Partnership) helps prepare local students for work and gives them an insight into working in the archives sector. The students learnt about the day-to-day work at MAC, created social media posts for us, and made a PowerPoint presentation for one of our forthcoming 'tea and chat' sessions (more about that on page 43!) They also spent a day with our archivist, Sarah Trim-West processing archive documents and began their own research into their family and house histories. Thank you to our volunteers and researchers who kindly met the students and chatted about their volunteer projects and research interests. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank our wonderful team of volunteers. You will see them when you come to our events, but our volunteers also help behind the scenes too. At the moment, we have volunteers researching Medway's tunnels, researching our local parish histories, creating an index of names in our police court records, researching the alleyways of Chatham, assisting customers with researching their family history, helping us prepare for a forthcoming volunteer project, and much more!

For all our forthcoming events, please see pages 42 and 43 in the *News and Events* section!

One day a herring gull landed in the garden. I saw it and thought it couldn't get up again without some sustenance. I was amazed at how large they are up close. The manager was at lunch at the time, so I was in charge. Mr Holt was there, but only for moral support, as I was only seventeen. What a to do! What to do was the question. I did not know, and neither did Mr Holt. The manager finally came back from lunch, and I went off for mine (only we called it dinner). When I came back, the gull was in the show room, examining the stock! It was being fed cake, not just any old cake, but battenburg from M&S, by the manager's wife, but then this was the west end of Chatham. She just happened to have returned from shopping there. I don't think she'd been sent specifically to buy cake for the gull!

The manager meanwhile had rung the RSPCA (or was it the RSPB?) who came forthwith. Rather worryingly the RSPCA/RSPB man donned really long thick gauntlets, as apparently these gulls can be rather vicious. We had been treating it like a pet budgie whilst it potted around the stock. Luckily no one was in the changing room as it might have given them a nasty nip, or even worse. It was also a good job it couldn't fly otherwise it would have ruined all the expensive, specialised stock. I think the man must have put it in a cage to take it away. I'm not really sure - because I kept well out of the way.

### Notes

1. At the time, *Swoop* was a well-known bird food sold in cardboard boxes – as below (eBay).





## The Shop Garden

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.*

In this issue, Janet reflects further on her time working in Medway's retail sector.

At the back of The Young Man's Shop, where I worked during the late sixties, there was a garden. Overgrown roses grew there, the bushes touching each other as they vied for space and light to enable them to grow, their lovely blooms in a range of hues. It was very romantic and I loved it, however it was decided that the garden needed to be *tidy*, so a person came to transform *my garden*. My lovely bushes were pruned to within an inch of their lives, never to bloom the same again.

Clearing the garden had, however, revealed Victorian beds edged with rope like stone in different geometric shapes and sizes. At the end of the garden was a wash house, once used when the shop was a private home. There was a very old knobbly toad that we think lived in the wash house. I did not kiss it as I must have known that my prince was not far away.

Now the garden was tidy, it had no soul. My friend Rose tried to grow peas in the newly cleared garden. I don't think they were sweet peas. I'm sure they were pea peas. Either way I don't think they ever came to anything. After a bit, birds came which I fed with *Swoop*,<sup>1</sup> bought with my meagre wages. Thinking of it now, I wonder if that's why the peas never grew. These birds were different to the sparrows we had in our garden at home, at the east end of Chatham. We only got tupp'ny ha'pny birds at that end. I learnt the identities of these exotic birds from the side of the *Swoop* packet. There were greenfinches, bluetits, blackbirds and thrushes, to name but a few. Age stops me remembering any more. But, once again the garden was *mine*, and I could sit there during the lunch breaks.

Spembly's, on the New Road, looked down into the garden, and the men were able to look down at me. I like to think that my husband-to-be was one of them, making the garden truly romantic, as I later found out that he worked there at the time.

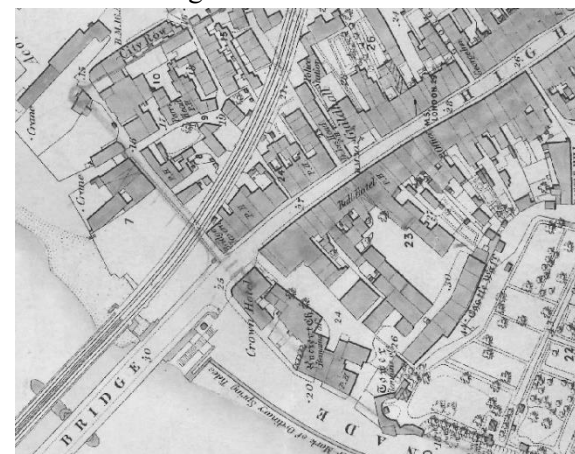
## MAC Lecture Series 2024

Emma Ovenden, Medway Archives Centre Librarian



From February to July 2024 Medway Archives Centre held its second lecture series, with a lecture taking place each month – and like last year we were delighted at its success! Following comments we received last year, we moved the lectures from the hall to the foyer. A much brighter and more welcoming space, and most importantly with better acoustics!

The first lecture in the series was delivered by Stuart Bligh, known to many of us, as he was formerly County Archivist for Kent and Head of Research and Information at the National Maritime Museum. Stuart presented a very interesting talk entitled *The Battle of Trafalgar* and our archivist, Sarah Trim-West kindly agreed we could have the famous Robert Sands document on display after the lecture. I am sure this document will be familiar to many FOMA members, as I believe one of the reasons FOMA was formed was to facilitate its purchase. For those new members who are unaware of it, this document was written by Robert Sands, who was born in St Margaret's parish, Rochester, in about 1788. He was a powder boy on the Chatham-built ship HMS *Temeraire* and the document gives his account of the Battle of Trafalgar.



*1860s OS map of Rochester High Street and its environs.*

Geoff Ettridge, aka Geoff Rambler, delivered the second lecture, *A Meander Along Rochester High Street*. Drawing on knowledge of the various tours Geoff leads in Rochester, he made connections between places along the High Street and our local and national past. His engaging and interesting talk explored some intriguing stories.

We were delighted Amanda Thomas kindly agreed to give the third lecture in the series. Entitled *The Real Oliver Twist: The Story of Charles Dickens and the Infant Pauper Asylum at Tooting*, Amanda presented a fascinating and moving talk about the children's workhouse, established in 1804, and the role Charles Dickens played in bringing the dreadful conditions to the public's attention. Amanda's talk also included a chilling story involving the trafficking of pauper children to other areas of the country.

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



*Chatham Station, early 1900s, from the collection of Brian Joyce.*

*Railway Street, Chatham* was the subject of our fifth lecture, given by Brian Joyce. Brian's knowledge shone through as he examined the history of Railway Street (formerly Rome Lane) in Chatham. Beginning at the railway station, his talk finished at Railway Street's junction with the High Street and Military Road. Brian shared insights about 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.

Last in the series was Catharina Clement talk, *The Lost Village of Gillingham*, on Wednesday, 3 July. Gillingham wasn't always the large, urban area we know today and, until incorporation in 1903, it was a thriving village in its own right centred around the parish of St Mary Magdalene. Cat's illustrated talk focussed on the history of the original village.

All the lectures were very popular, and we were pleased to receive positive feedback. We are very grateful to all the speakers who took part in the lecture series, and for their support of MAC. We very much hope to host a lecture series again next year – watch this space for details!

The Napoleonic War stimulated the development and expansion of Sheerness Dockyard and there was a lot of new construction work going on throughout the 1820s while John Grant was there. The first phase of the works was the Great Basin and its three dry docks. They were formally opened on 5 September 1823 by the Admiral of the Fleet, the Duke of Clarence, third son of George III. It must have been an exciting day for the whole yard as well as the people of Sheerness. John was probably on duty, but I expect he made sure his wife and family had a good view of events from the *Lion*.

## Family Life

It was while he was on the *Lion* that, in 1819, John married a local girl, Mary Ann Lissenden. Their first child, Thomas, was born on the *Lion* and throughout his life he always tells the census enumerator that he was born 'at sea'. The practice of wives and families living on royal navy ships was meant to have ended by then but clearly it still occurred at Sheerness. Throughout the 1820s, John's children were all baptised in the Wesleyan Chapel at Sheerness.

NAME	AGE	SEX	RELATION	PLACE OF BIRTH
Thomas Grant	80	M	Head	At Sea (H.M.S. Lion)
Elizabeth Do.	74	F	Wife	Do.

1901 census showing the entry for my great, great grandfather, Thomas Grant, at Burnt Oak Terrace, New Brompton (soon to become Gillingham) and his statement that he was born 'at sea'.

Soon after John's service at Sheerness Dockyard came to an end in 1828, he returned to Chatham and spent the second half of his life there as a labourer at Chatham Dockyard. John Grant died on 22 April 1863 aged 73. His death certificate says he was a dockyard pensioner, had died of 'paralysis 3 days' and that he died in the Medway Union at Chatham: the workhouse.

*With thanks to the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich and the Victoria and Albert Museum (see the inside back cover).*

The post was introduced in 1806 by the Commissioners of Naval Revision who made the recommendation that when ships came into a yard for a refit, the initial survey should be carried out by a new dockyard officer, the Master Measurer, who would then be able to estimate accurately the cost of the work on a detailed form. The position would be inferior to one of the five principal officers: the Master Shipwright, the Master Attendant, the Clerk of the Cheque, the Storekeeper and the Clerk of the Survey, but higher than the Master Caulker, the Master Joiner, or the Master Mastmaker. The Master Measurer needed his own boat crew so that he could inspect ships from all angles. In 1823 the crew at Sheerness consisted of Robert Nightingale, John Jarvis, William Handley, Benjamin Jarrett, Charles Craddock, our own John Grant, and lastly a Peter Green.



*Hulks at Sheerness in 1824 by Henry Moses; National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London, PAD7884.*

## *Local and Community History Month at Medway Archives Centre*

Emma Ovenden, Medway Archives Centre Librarian



Local and Community History Month (LCHM) takes place each May. To celebrate this year's event, the MAC team visited a number of locations, encouraging people who don't usually visit us to engage with their fantastic local history.

Wednesday, 15 May

*Focus on ... Twydall at Twydall Library.*



Helen Worthy and I were able to take a range of local studies material including books, photographs, and items of ephemera including a scrapbook that brought back many happy memories for one visitor. We were also able to take maps showing the Twydall area before the Twydall Green development was built, which were very popular with visitors.

*Emma Ovenden at Twydell Library*

Tuesday, 21 May

Drop-in for Local and Community History Month at Mid-Kent College's Gillingham Campus.

Alison Thomas and I took along a number of items, including a facsimile copy of the Domesday book for Kent. This showed the entry for Gillingham together with a translation of the Latin entry. We also took a facsimile of a poster for the Rochester Historical Pageant of 1931, and a desk based assessment by Wessex Archaeology from August 2004 of the then proposed Mid-Kent College campus at Gillingham. We also took a facsimile plan of the Short Brothers Sunderland Mark IV flying boat – which generated a lot of interest from the engineering students!

*Alison Thomas at Mid-Kent College's Gillingham Campus.*



Thursday, 23 May  
*Focus on ... Grain at Grain Library*

Although space is limited at the library in Grain, Helen and I were able to take a range of local studies material including books and maps. The community at Grain were very interested in the resources and particularly enjoyed looking at nineteenth and early twentieth century maps of the area.

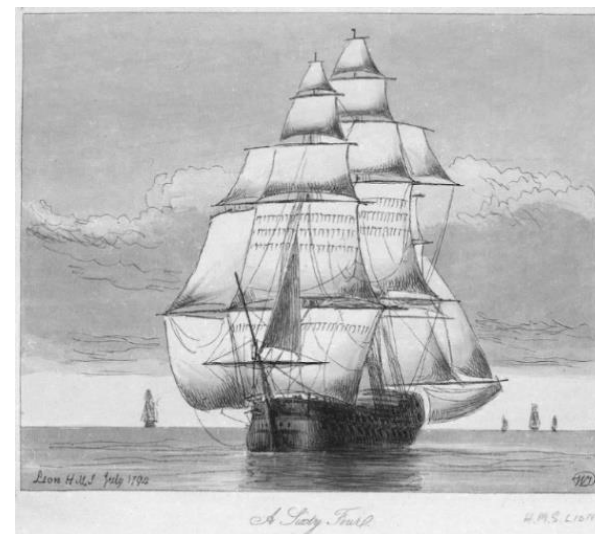
Wednesday, 29 May  
*Focus on... Wigmore at Wigmore Library*

Nikki Pratt, Eleanor Cooke, Helen and I were able to take copies of photographs, an exhibition folder with information on the local area, and maps showing the development of Wigmore. As more of the team were able to attend this drop-in, which took place during the schools' May break, we were delighted to also offer children's craft from our *Marvellous Maps* activity – which proved popular with younger visitors!



*Eleanor, Emma and Helen.*

HMS *Lion* 1819-1828



*An etching of HMS Lion which had an active career including taking Lord Macartney's embassy to China 1792-4; National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London, PAD5994.*

The *Lion* was a 3<sup>rd</sup> rate ship of 64 guns launched at Portsmouth in 1777 and converted to a sheer hull at Sheerness in 1816 i.e. it was dismasted and kept as an accommodation ship. In 1820 there were 45 ships of all types in Ordinary at Sheerness. The largest being the 1st rate *Howe* followed by the 2nd rate *Cambridge* and about 20 3<sup>rd</sup> rate ships, i.e. carrying 74 guns. Whilst in reserve, each 3<sup>rd</sup> rate ship only had four men paid to look after them: one gunner, one boatswain, one carpenter and one cook. Fully crewed a 3<sup>rd</sup> rate ship held about 550 men so it must have been an eerie experience to have only four men on board. Fifty-five men are listed as being on the *Lion* and most of them belonged to the boat crews of dockyard officials. For example, the Commissioner's boat had 11 men, the Master Attendant's boat crew consisted of seven men, the Master Measurer's boat seven men, and the Clerk of the Cheque's crew was five men. From the first quarter of 1822 John Grant is listed as being part of the Master Measurer's boat crew where he stayed for the next six years. Throughout his time at Sheerness, John remains an Able Seaman and continues to earn just over £5 11s each quarter. On the inside back page there is an illustration from the National Maritime Museum at Greenwich of a 'Common Sailor'.

### The Master Measurer

The late eighteenth century saw a big improvement in dockyard reforms that the Admiralty had decided were necessary to bring efficiencies, improve working practices and reduce the widespread corruption that took place by dockyard suppliers and even by those who ran the yards. The following explanation of the job of the Master Measurer is taken from Roger Morriss's book *The Royal Dockyards during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars*, 1983.



## John Grant

Peter Bursey



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

### Part Three: John Grant at Sheerness (1816-1828) and Chatham

At the conclusion of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 many thousands of soldiers and sailors were no longer required by the state and had to do the best they could to find work. My maternal ancestor John Grant (c1790-1863), who had served in the Royal Navy 1803-1815, was one of this number. Fortune favoured him as he managed to re-enlist and spent twelve years at Sheerness Dockyard 1816-1828 [Certificates of Service ADM 29/64/337].

#### HMS *Brune* June 1816 to June 1819

The first reference to John Grant at Sheerness dockyard comes in the 1816 Paymaster records for Sheerness [ADM 42/1569]. John is aboard the *Brune*: a 5<sup>th</sup> rate ship of 38 guns, originally the French *Thetis* captured by the British in 1808; by 1816 she had become a depot ship in the 'Sheerness Ordinary' i.e. was in reserve. The records tell us that John was paid £1 13s 6d a month and out of his quarterly pay 3s 3d was deducted as his contribution to the Chatham Chest – basically his pension contribution. Another 1s 8d was deducted as his contribution to Greenwich Hospital, another form of insurance policy in case of future injury. All sailors had to pay towards these two institutions. Altogether there are 126 men listed as being aboard the *Brune*. Most men had their wages paid to an Edward Bishop, probably an agent, who sent money to the sailors' families. John Grant is found in all the pay ledgers for the *Brune* up until the second quarter of 1819 when, on 22 June, he is discharged from that ship and transferred to the *Lion*, described as a sheer hulk.

## The Isaac Newell Statue – the Latest News

Amanda Thomas



Progress continues on the project to remember one of Strood's greatest sons, Isaac Newell. Following Medway's Council's agreement in principle to erect a statue of Isaac Newell as part of the new Strood waterfront development (see *The Clock Tower*, Issue 74, May 2024), a lot has been going on!

At the beginning of June, some members of the Isaac Newell Heritage Group (INHG) had a meeting with Allison Young, the Community Project Co-ordinator at Sheerness Dockyard Preservation Trust, and who advises Medway Council on arts and cultural projects. We discussed the next steps regarding the position of the statue, how it should be commissioned and also how we should go about raising the significant sum of money that will be required.

Following that meeting, it was agreed that Group member, Jon Rye would guide the group through the process, given his considerable experience with projects of this type, and his organisation of the 2022 exhibition *Isaac Newell: More than a Name* (see *The Clock Tower*, Issue 68, November 2022). Jon wasted no time in setting up a timeline and re-named the project Operation Statue, or *OpStat*!

An extraordinary number of people are now working towards what was once thought an almost unachievable goal (no pun intended), or at least by Adrian Pope (pictured on page 2) who has been campaigning for the statue for over 20 years. On 16 July the INHG met once again with Medway Council and the Medway Development Company to discuss how the various threads of this exciting project are coming together. We know that the statue will be a huge draw for tourists, and as a result a boost to the local economy, but it is essential that Isaac's legacy is portrayed correctly and appropriately within the development, and which we hope will also form a part of the heritage trail which is being devised by Sandra Fowler and Cindy O'Halloran. Shortly after the meeting, Dr Alexander Thomas submitted our application to Historic England's national blue plaque scheme, in the hope that Isaac's early life in Strood will also be recognised. The INHG is taking a bit of a break over the summer in anticipation of a busy autumn ahead and the establishment of a formal plan for the greatest task of all – fundraising!

*On the inside front cover are a couple of images from the inaugural Rochester and District Football League Isaac Newell Trophy Final which was held at the end of May.*

## *A History of British Concrete Ships*

Richard Lewis



*Richard Lewis, originally from Manchester, now lives in Carlingford, Co. Louth, Republic of Ireland. His interest in concrete ships was first triggered by Cretegaff, the last floating survivor of the WWI British 'Crete Fleet' that lies in Carlingford Marina. Richard has been researching concrete ships for five years now and has completed a number of manuscripts featuring British World Wars One and Two, United States World Wars one and Two, and the wartime engineering marvels of British engineer, Guy Anson Maunsell. He is currently researching and writing about Mulberry Harbours. Richard, along with his collaborator, Erlend Bonderud of Norway, is building a comprehensive encyclopaedia of concrete on their website [www.thecretefleet.com](http://www.thecretefleet.com)*

In this two-part series, FOMA Member, Richard Lewis provides an introduction to the history of concrete shipbuilding, and the significant Medway connections from both World Wars.

### Part One: A Potted History of British Concrete Shipbuilding

In 1848, Frenchman, Joseph-Louis Lambot built a ferro-cement dinghy, patented it and presented it at the 1855 Exposition Universelle in Paris. However, it was not until many years later, and by the outbreak of World War One, that concrete shipbuilding innovation had led to the construction of a number of concrete barges for inland waterways use. It was to be the catastrophic impact of the German U-boat campaign on the Allied merchant fleet that would spur the first major era of ocean-going concrete shipbuilding. The impact of shipping losses, combined with an acute shortage of steel, of shipyard capacity and of skilled labour, motivated the construction of ocean-going concrete vessels. Concrete ships were claimed to be cheaper and quicker to build using unskilled labour and they saved on steel. Then, on 2 August 1917, Norwegian Nicolay Fougner launched the World's first ocean-going self-propelled concrete ship, *Namsenfjord*, an 84 feet long, 356-ton, freighter. The ship attracted a great deal of interest and in September 1917, Lloyd's of London, created a classification for the insurance of ferro-concrete ships.

Appointed to the Trust in 1907, Filmer won his Military Cross in action at Neuve Chapelle on 11 December 1915. Tragically, he died after being mortally wounded by shellfire, when he went hunting for his glasses on his horse (unfortunately, this fact is true - in life, he was actually very short-sighted) He is buried in the communal cemetery extension at Merville, of interest to the Trust, as it was designed by Sir Herbert Baker,\* who worked on designs for restoration of the Bridge Chapel in 1937 and Chamber refurbishment in 1939. The Court resolved on 6<sup>th</sup> March 1916 to honour his memory with a suitable plaque. Designed by (then) Mr Herbert Baker, it can be seen today at the top of the Bridge Chamber staircase.

### Endpiece

The Great War ceased on 11<sup>th</sup> November 1918. Britain had suffered material damage from air attack, and immense loss of life, but those lasting effects of the "war to end all wars" had not had the same massive impacts on Rochester Bridge.

### Notes:

1. Rochester Bridge Trust (RBT) Minute Book 1909-1919 report "Rochester Bridge – REPORTS Regarding Military Protection" (Special Court meeting, 12<sup>th</sup> October 1914)
2. RBT Minute Book 1909-1919 report "Rochester Bridge – REPORTS Regarding Military Protection" (Special Court meeting, 12<sup>th</sup> October 1914)
3. RBT Minute Book 1909-1919, Court Meeting 13<sup>th</sup> December 1915

### \*Editor's Note

Readers will recall the many articles published in *The Clock Tower* by Sir Herbert Baker's grandson, FOMA member Michael Baker. Specifically in Issue 56, November 2019, Michael transcribed a letter written by his grandfather in 1940, during WWII. A book on Sir Herbert's Life by John Stewart entitled, *Sir Herbert Baker: Architect to the British Empire* is available on Amazon and at all good bookshops (ISBN 978-1476684345). In addition, if you are interested in celebrating the life of one of our greatest (but perhaps least known) architects, there is a Herbert Baker Society in the early stages of formation. You can find out more at <https://herbertbaker.com/herbert-baker-society/> or email Camilla Baker at [Society@herbertbaker.com](mailto:Society@herbertbaker.com)

## British World War One Concrete Shipbuilding

The British government decided to fund a £4 million programme to construct 154 ocean-going concrete ships - 24 steam tugs and 130 barges. 17 new shipyards, mainly established by construction companies that had never built a ship before, set about building the *Crete Ships*, so called because their names were prefixed with *Crete*, and suffixed with a noun. *Crete Barges* were typically 180 feet long, 31 feet 6 inches wide and 19 feet 6 inches deep, carrying around 1,000 tons. *Crete Tugs* were 125 feet long, 27 feet 6 inches wide and 14 feet 9 inches deep; their 750 IHP (Indicated Horse Power) triple-expansion steam engines towed loaded barges at 10 knots.

In April 1919, the programme was cancelled and only vessels in an advanced state of construction were completed. The final total was 12 Crete Tugs and 52 Crete Barges, launched at Aberdeen, Stockton and Thornaby-on-Tees, Barnstaple, Tilbury, Fiddlers Ferry, Shoreham-by-Sea, Barrow-in-Furness, Gloucester, Hamworthy, Preston, Warrenpoint, Greenock, Rochford, Northfleet, Amble, Southwick-on-Wear and Queenborough.

Additionally, nine other concrete ships and barges were built to varying design. Two were built at Faversham of which one survives today at Hoo.

### *Crete*dyke

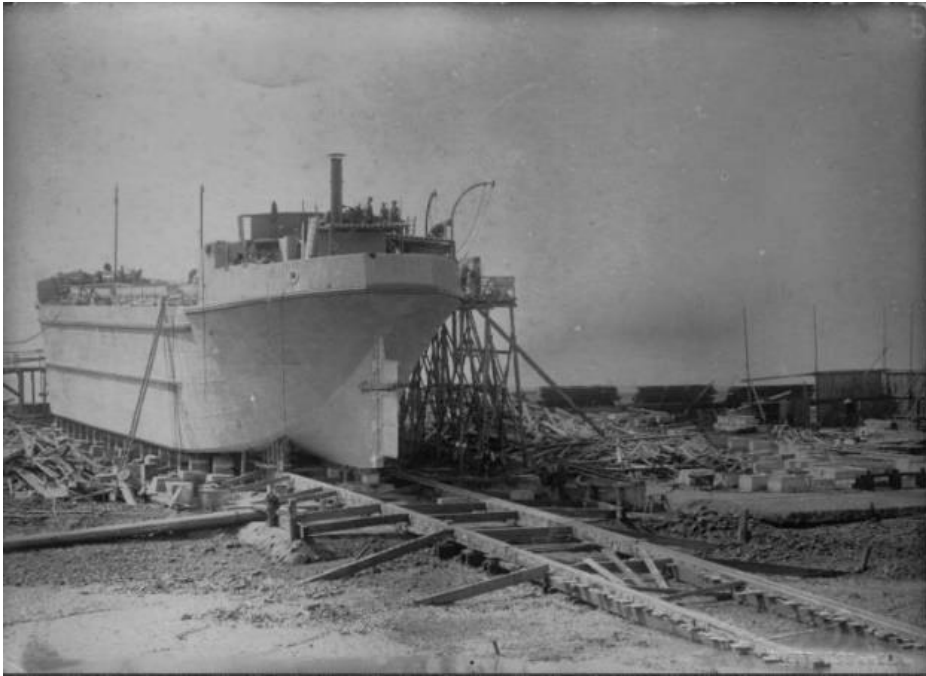
The Queenborough Shipbuilding Company Limited received orders for ten barges, but only one was completed. Launched on 14 August 1919, the barge was named *Crete*dyke and registered as No. 143392 at Lloyd's. Between Autumn 1919 and Autumn 1923, *Crete*dyke made various voyages from Hull, Sunderland, Newcastle and Blythe carrying cargos such as coal, coke and pitch to near Continent destinations including Le Havre, Antwerp and Hamburg. On 9 October 1923, whilst being towed by the concrete tug *Crete*boom, and carrying a cargo of 990 tons of coal bound for Petrograd, she foundered in heavy seas, three miles south south east of the Elbe Lightvessel, and was lost.



*East Sutton Church - East stained-glass window (grant aided by the Trust)  
(Rochester Bridge Trust)*



*Sir Robert Filmer memorial  
plaque (Rochester Bridge Trust).*



*The only known photograph of Cretedyke; reproduced with the kind permission of Trevor Edwards, <https://pbase.com/luckytrev/image/41150826>*

### *Molliette and Violette*

Two concrete ships were built by James Pollock and Sons Ltd at Faversham Creek, commissioned by Bernard Oppenheimer. Christened *Molliette* and *Violette*, they were three masted schooners weighing 290 tons, with centrally situated 120 BHP (Break Horse Power), two-cylinder Bolinder Type M crude oil engines that could make a speed of 7 knots without the use of sails. They were 125 feet 6 inches long, 25 feet wide and 10 feet 4 inches deep, with a 293 Gross Registered Tonnage and a 640-ton displacement.

Later additions were reported by the Bridge Engineer on 1 June 1916, whereby at the request of the staff officer, Captain Owen, barbed wire was to be fixed to the piers, abutments and the footpath (already out-of-bounds to the public) on the downstream side of the Bridge.

On 11 December 1916, the Court was updated on the Military Authorities' request (October 1916) to use of the Bridge Chamber itself as a recruitment office, which would deepen involvement of the Trust with the war effort. The Trust was happy to accede to this under certain conditions to prevent damage to the premises, including: 'protection of the panelling, stained glass window, steps, etc, during the Military occupation, and an estimate...for removing and storing the furniture.' Fortunately for the Bridge Chamber, the proposal was not proceeded with!

### The Economic Dimension of Conflict

The risks of air attack in World War One were initially not understood but became more of a concern with the advent of Zeppelin airships, with the later additional threat posed by German Gotha biplane bombers. At this time, airborne conflict was in its infancy - potential apocalyptic fears of widespread devastation posed by aerial bombardment only materialised post-war and into during the 1930s.

Despite Government insurance being available against damage by aircraft/airships, this was not immediately taken out by the Trust. On 12 Oct 1914, against war risk, the Wardens considered: 'insurance of the Bridge ... prohibitive, having regard to the limited nature of any possible injury to the Bridge from bombs. (With) precautions ... being taken by the Military and Police Authorities, they decided to take no further steps to effect [sic] such insurance.' Nevertheless, the Trust's initial considerations of the need for no or little action were influenced by the progress of the war.

Action was subsequently taken for the Bridge Chapel/Chamber and parts of the estate in Rochester, when 'the Wardens ... effected an insurance of the structure of the Bridge and Approaches against damage by aircraft under the Government Scheme, for £100,000 for one year ...'<sup>3</sup>

### Personal Impacts of War

World War One saw the rush of men to the colours, with the Trust being similarly swept along. On 10 August 1914, the Trust's assistant resident engineer, C Gordon Robson, joined No. 1 Company of the Kent Royal Garrison Artillery as a gunner, serving at Garrison Point Fort, Sheerness. As with the tragic loss of lives associated with the conflict in France, the war mortally impacted Trust membership, with the death in military service of Baronet, Captain Sir Robert Marcus Filmer MC, at Merville, near Bethune, France, on 27 January 1916.



The advent of war generated uncertainty and nervousness, to the extent that a nearly-fatal friendly fire incident occurred – the Bridge Engineer John Robson reported that:

‘On the night of 14th August (*the same date that General Maxwell had signed the notices!*) at 10.30, the Police patrol boat ... on duty under the Bridge was fired on by the sentries for not answering their repeated challenge. Fortunately, no one was wounded. Having made enquiries respecting the incident, I consider the sentries did their duty, and that it will have a good moral effect, as many citizens do not yet realize that a state of war exists, and that they must obey orders, whilst the Police must act in concert with the Military. These incidents together with others ... occurring almost nightly in the district, justify the precautions ... being taken for the protection of the Bridge.’

Other measures were now quickly implemented, with the Bridge Engineer noting on 28 September that:

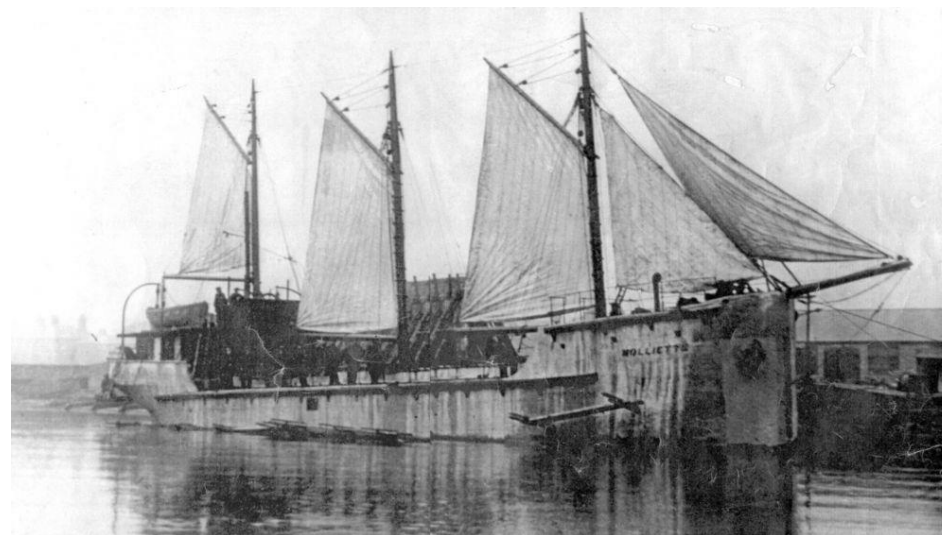
‘... the Bridge continues to be guarded by the Military ... . The River under the Bridge is now patrolled by the Police Launch, with Police and Special Constables. The Chief of Police has ... complete instructions ... what to do in case of damage being done to the Bridge. The visit of an RE officer to the Bridge ... unknown to staff at Chatham, but subsequently identified as a Major Robertson, was the cause of correspondence between the General Staff and myself; although it appears his visit was unauthorised, it was of some good, as it enabled me to furnish Military Authorities in the District with important particulars respecting the Bridge and obtain greater efficiency in its protection.

They have this week closed the upstream footpath and placed two sentries upon it continually, to effectually stop loitering on the part of the public. In response to the requirements of the Military Authorities, the archways in the swing bridge pier have been boarded up as well as the opening under the steps to Strood Esplanade leading to the gas compression plant.

...Further reduction of the gas lighting of the Bridge has (resulted) from (the event on) ... the 9th, (when) at 7.0 p.m., an air ship (not English) was seen over the Medway District between Sheerness and Chatham. Notice was about this time issued by the Government to Municipal Authorities recommending extinction of lights on all docks, bridges, etc., when possible. Lamps on the Bridge have been reduced to a minimum, and smaller lamps substituted ... at the piers and abutments which light the underside of the Bridge. Just sufficient light is now left to enable the sentries to have a clear view over all parts of the Bridge. In view of the gravity of the crisis through which the country is passing, every possible care is being exercised to ensure the safety of the Bridge.’<sup>2</sup>

Other physical measures noted by the Court on 7 December 1914 included the siting of a Military Guard Box at the Rochester end of the Bridge, at the request of Major Knox, Royal Engineers, plus the necessity: ‘for all damage (if any) to be made good and the hut removed at the end of the War, or removal of the Military Guard.’

*Molliette* was laid down on 2 September 1918, launched on 19 November 1918 and in February 1919, left for France in ballast to pick up redundant munitions. Whilst anchored at Erith to unload, she was run down by the steamer *Prince Charles*. Somewhat prone to calamity and extremely unwieldy to handle, she went aground on numerous occasions, both off the coast of England and France. In February 1922, her engines were damaged, they could not be repaired and were removed. *Molliette* was then towed to St Lawrence Bay on the Blackwater, where she was used as a houseboat until she was moved to Mersea in 1925. Between 1931 and 1934, she was used by the West Mersea Yacht Club as a clubhouse, during which period she broke her back.



*Molliette* in her trading days. She was built by James Pollock, Faversham in 1919, Official no. 143031. Ron Green Collection. With thanks to the Mersea Museum.

By 1935, *Molliette* had been taken over and converted into a nightclub, known as the East Coast Cruising Club. The club was raided by the police in September 1935, and the principals subsequently prosecuted for selling intoxicating liquor after hours and the use of gaming machines.

During World War Two, she was requisitioned by the army as an observation post, and, in 1943, used by the American Air Force as a *floating* target. She was then subjected to a series of airborne assaults, dive bombing, machine gunning and rockets. After the war, a local man started dredging for brass shell cases around the wreck and, apparently, the value of his haul was sufficient to purchase a piece of land on which he built a dwelling, aptly named *Molliette*. *Molliette* is visible on low spring tides at 51°46'07.8"N 0°59'31.2"E



*A recent drone image of Molliette taken by Jim Pullen.*

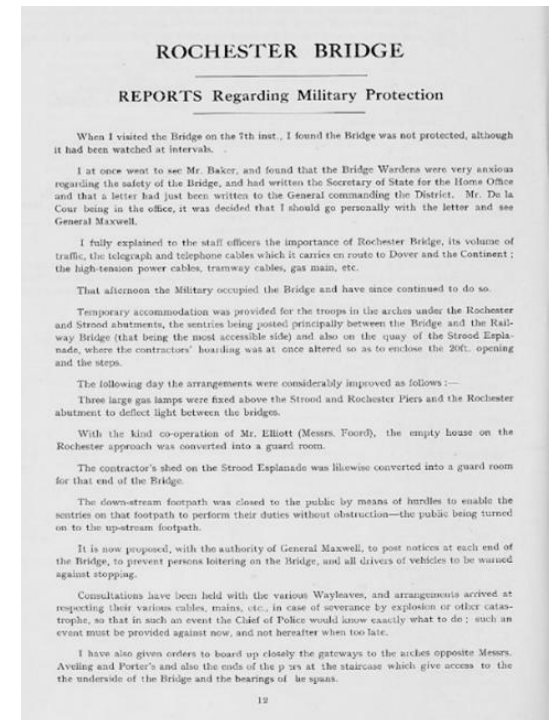
The construction of *Violette* commenced on 14 March 1919, and she launched on 22 May 1919. After sea trials in August 1919, she was rejected by Bernard Oppenheimer and re-registered to Pollock's. On 18 January 1921, on a voyage from Antwerp to London, she crashed into Southend Pier, demolishing fifty yards of the pier and was subsequently declared a constructive loss. Pollock's bought the wreck, removed the engine and then dumped the hulk on Seasalter beach. Sold by auction in July 1923, *Violette* was then moored above Sun Pier, Chatham, and used by New Medway Steam Packet Company as a refuelling lighter.

## Physical Aspects of the Conflict - effect on structures

The most obvious impact is that of the physical effect on structures, but there is a distinct contrast between World Wars One and Two. The Minute Books highlight that contrast, with their recording of defence measures being somewhat less circumspect during World War One, in comparison to the later conflict.

Preparations for World War One almost materialised by accident – with the declaration of war on Germany on 4 August 1914, nothing immediately happened! Only with the Wardens writing to the Home Office and the Bridge Engineer, John Robson personally visiting General Maxwell (commanding the District) to enquire as to what measures were envisaged prompted an official reaction, whereby the Military quietly 'occupied' the Bridge that same afternoon, 7 August 1914, with:

- the establishment of a guardroom at either end of the Bridge
- the closure of the downstream footpath, to enable sentries to proceed with unimpeded patrols (same *modus operandi* of the Old Bridge today!)
- installation of notices at either end of the Bridge, to prevent pedestrians loitering, plus vehicles from stopping on the Bridge
- orders to board up closely the gateways to the arches opposite Aveling and Porter's (Strood side), plus the ends of the piers at the staircase giving access to the underside of the Bridge and the bearings.<sup>1</sup>



*Extract from 'Rochester Bridge - REPORTS Regarding Military Protection' (1909-1919 Minute Book, Rochester Bridge Trust)*

## 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.*

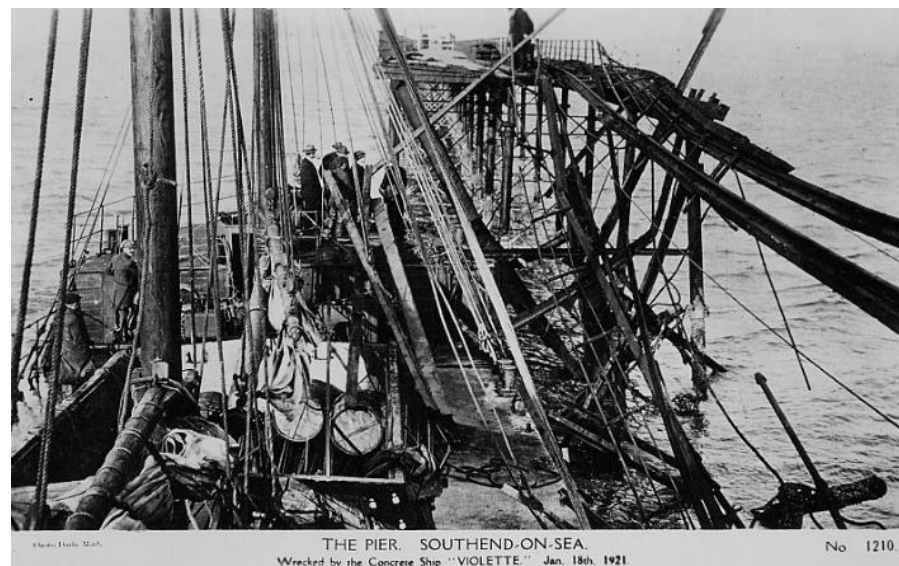
*The exhibition, Rochester Bridge in Times of Conflict can be viewed at the Bridge Chamber and Chapel on Wednesdays and Saturdays from 30 March until 31 July 2024; and from 18 September until 23 October 2024, 11am-4pm. The exhibition is free to view. For more information, see the back page and The Rochester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

## Part Two – The First World War

### Introduction

Since construction of the original nearly 2,000 years ago, 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. This article uses Rochester Bridge Trust's historic Minute Books to relate the experience of the Bridge to the upheavals of the First World War, drawing out physical, economic and human aspects.

Co-located next to two rail bridges, Rochester Bridge occupied a key location in the Medway Towns, as the sole road crossing of the Medway between Rochester and Strood. The Medway Towns themselves were highly strategic, containing the vital naval base at Chatham Dockyard, plus considerable light industry which would be geared to the war effort.



*The Pier, Southend-on-Sea. Wrecked by the Concrete Ship "Violette". Jan 18<sup>th</sup> 1921. Image from the author's collection.*



*A fascinating close up of Violette showing its concrete structure taken more recently by Richard Lewis.*

## *In the Footsteps of a Huntsman on foot from Kemzeke*

1913-1919 –

Rien Van Driessen, Harry and Hilde Van  
Driessen-Meersschaert



*Harry Van Driessen and Hilde Meersschaert live with their youngest son Rien in the village of Kemzeke, Belgium. Harry is the grandson of Alfred Van Driessen, the huntsman on foot in the article which follows. Little was known about Alfred's life, only that he was once a soldier in the Great War and afterwards, just under 42 years old, died prematurely of lung and/or blood cancer, the result of contact with war gas. Even his own children barely knew him.*

*Some old photographs and a yellowed military file were the start of a long search for Alfred's war history. During the years 2018 to 2022, the authors visited just about every location where their (great) grandfather had stayed and fought during the First World War. Harry is a biologist and worked in a horticultural school until his retirement in 2024. Hilde is still active as a foot nurse. Rien works as a technician in the automotive industry.*

In March 2021, then FOMA Secretary, Odette Buchanan received an email from Harry and Hilde Van Driessen in Meersschaert, Belgium. The letter began: 'About a month ago during the cleaning of our office, we found a shoebox filled with old photos among which - to our surprise - some of our grandfather Alfred Van Driessen, born in Kemseke, 22/12/1893.'

The Van Driessens discovered Alfred had been wounded in battle at St.-Georges (Nieuwpoort, Belgium) in October 1914 and then hospitalized. It appeared he had been sent to Red Cross hospitals in Sittingbourne and Chislehurst and remained in England until March 1915 when he returned to the battlefield. Whilst sadly we at FOMA were unable to help with the research, Harry and Hilde were able to piece together Alfred's story and it was eventually published in the Belgian magazine, *d'Euzie*, a publication similar to *The Clock Tower* and produced by the Stekene Historical Circle in Belgium. They and the Van Driessens have given their kind permission for us to reproduce Parts 13 (Part One) and 14 (Part Two in the next issue of *The Clock Tower*) of the article. These were originally published in June and December 2023 respectively.



*Access to Christ Church Hall*



*Driveway Hornbrook House car park*

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*Wounded Belgians at one of the British Red Cross Hospitals, Chislehurst 1914.*

### In the Footsteps of ... Chislehurst

We travel to Chislehurst by train and are received at the station by Joanna Friel, Chairman of The Chislehurst Society. She is willing to drive us around in Chislehurst. The station building has hardly changed. Also the former parish hall Christ Church Hall still exists and is now used for childcare. The original Hornbrook House has now been demolished and replaced by Hornbrook House Car Park.



*Chislehurst station*

## Part 13: Unexpectedly to England! (1)

Parts 1-12 [described how during] the great war our (great) grandfather Alfred Van Driessen was active at the front almost all the time until he was seriously wounded and evacuated from the battlefield on March 7, 1918.

### End of Story?

On September 16, 1913, our grandfather Alfred Van Driessen commenced his military service as Huntsman on Foot in the barracks of Charleroi. On the morning of August 3, 1914, he went to war to defend the city of Liège. On September 30, 1919 he returned to Kemzeke. He had survived the war!

Autumn 2020: our story was finished. Where five years earlier our grandfather had been an obscure person, we now knew in detail where he had stayed and slept during those war years, where he had fought and lived among fellow soldiers, had been injured, evacuated and nursed.

We lost track of him once. On October 24, 1914 he was wounded for the first time in the surroundings of Sint-Joris (Nieuwpoort). In his military file we read: '1914, 24 October – hurt in Saint-Georges - evacuated for injury' and '1915, March 26 – present at the 4th huntsmen on foot – from the hospital.' So there was an absence from the front for five months, nothing more is mentioned. Where did he stay during that period? In the chaos of Autumn 1914, there was hardly any registration of the evacuated soldiers and their transfer to faraway military hospitals.

### Two Surprising Photos

Spring 2021: Hilde rummages through a few boxes of old documents. She finds some photos that may have never been thoroughly examined due to their poor condition. She doesn't recognize anyone at first glance. The first photo is a 'Post Card' on which we see a street scene with stately villas and three parked 'cars' in front of them and a text at the bottom: 'Wounded Belgian Soldiers Leaving Red Cross Hospital To See the State Opening Of Parliament Nov. 11th 1914.' There is a handwritten text on the back that we can decipher with some effort: 'Dear parents - You should keep this card well, it's a beautiful memorial, I sit in the back of the automobile with my sako, [sic] you will certainly recognize me. A thousand kisses to all of you my dear ones.'

## Even more Puzzle Pieces start to fit Together

In the British Newspaper Archive numerous routes are described along which wounded Belgian soldiers were transported to specially equipped 'WWI hospitals - British Red Cross'.

One route turned out to be correct. A large group of Belgian soldiers arrived from Dunkirk on Sunday morning, October 25, 1914 in Folkestone. The original destination was actually Dover, but due to very bad weather conditions it was not possible to moor there.

About 25 soldiers were taken from Folkestone that same Sunday with motorized ambulances to Sittingbourne, where a Red Cross hospital was temporarily set up in Trinity Hall, a kind of parish hall attached to the Holy Trinity Church. It was a small emergency hospital from which the soldiers were transported as quickly as possible to better equipped hospitals inland (Kent and Greater London regions).

Monday and Tuesday October 26 and 27 arrived from Sittingbourne a group of Belgian soldiers by train at the railway station of Chislehurst.

From there they were taken by horse and cart or by car to Christ Church Hall, a parish hall adjacent to the church building. triage took place there based on their injuries so that they could subsequently be transferred more focused to other Red Cross hospitals. On October 14, opened in Chislehurst the Holbrook Auxiliary Hospital with 35 beds. The same day, all places were taken by Belgian soldiers. To increase capacity, a second hospital was opened on October 16, Hornbrook Auxiliary Hospital with 50 beds. This is where the soldiers who arrived on October 26 and 27, 1914, ended up.

## Chislehurst – Hornbrook House

We received a message from Joanna Friel about the photo of our grandfather and other soldiers posing in front of a facade: 'Yes that image of Hornbrook House is much treasured in Chislehurst.' The Chislehurst Society owns several similar photos that were taken in the garden of Hornbrook House and ... Joanna even sent us an additional photo of a larger group of Belgian soldiers posing in the same garden. We also recognize our grandfather Alfred Van Driessen in that photo.

So we got certainty: our grandfather was staying in Chislehurst, Hornbrook Auxiliary Hospital. The Belgian soldiers were liked by the residents of Chislehurst? What kind of house was Hornbrook? Why was our grandfather 'in that car'? Where was he driving to? We'll tell you about that in the next episode. In the words of Joanna Friel to say: 'That story is just incredible!'



*Wounded Belgian soldiers leaving Red Cross Hospital to see the State Opening of Parliament Nov 11 1914.*



*Postcard wounded Belgian Soldiers... (a photographer friend was kind enough to professionally retouch the photo with Photoshop).*

## Additional Photos

In a forgotten box with old documents, two more photos turn up that can be linked to our grandfather's stay in England. We also forward those photos to our contacts in England.

Even the Internet reveals its secrets. After hours of searching, Hilde finds on Kentww1.com a photo of Trinity Hall Sittingbourne, equipped as an emergency hospital, dated October 26, 1914. It is actually unbelievable, but our grandfather is in the fourth bed of the middle row. What's more, we recognize the patients in the second bed in the middle row and in the second bed on the left from the photo in which our grandfather poses with his fellow sufferers in front of a facade.



*Trinity Hall, Sittingbourne, October 26 1914.*



*Four Belgian soldiers, laughing and in the good company of a nurse. Our grandfather on the left.*

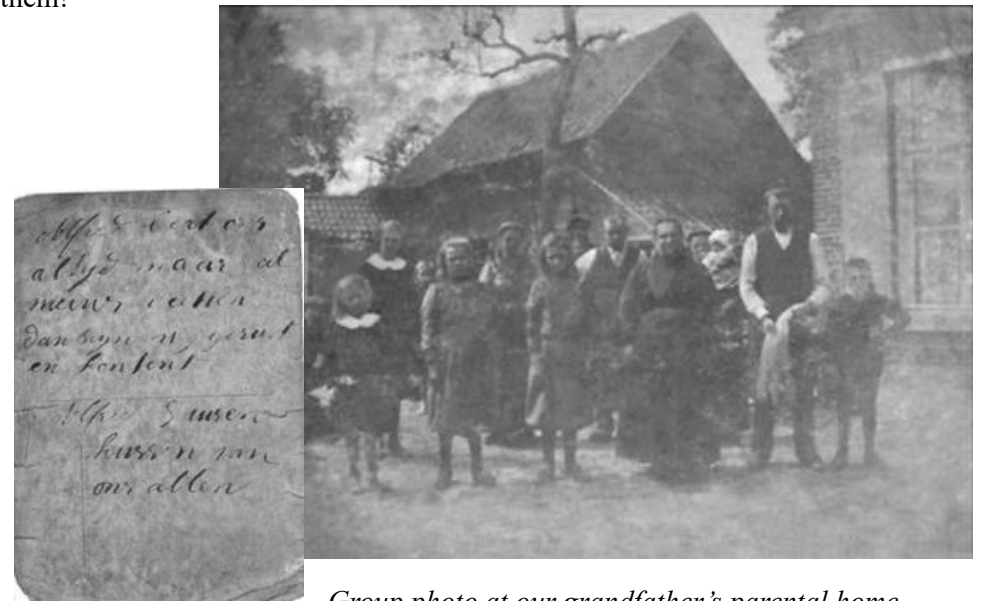
The second photo is actually in worse condition and very blurry. In the updated version we see a group of people with a father and mother in the front row posing with their children on the left and right. On the back it is handwritten: 'Alfred always let us know about news, then we are reassured and satisfied. Alfred a thousand kisses from us all.'

The two photos are slightly bent inwards in an identical manner. Apparently they have been neatly stored in the same wallet for years, perhaps our grandfather's?

## The Puzzle Starts to Fit Together

The postcard was sent mid-November 1914 by our grandfather from England to his relatives in Kemzeke. The second photo was taken specifically to send back as a response. Together with a number of neighbors and acquaintances, the family poses at the parental home. Stand the front right mother Colette Verlee and (step)father Alfons Van Driessen. To the left of the parents are the sisters of our grandfather, Anna Maria Van Driessen and Augusta Van Driessen. On the right hand side of the parents is the younger brother Reguul Van Driessen.

The two photos were in our grandfather's wallet for years, he must have cherished them!



*Group photo at our grandfather's parental home.*

## Where in England?

The question now remains: where and when do we locate our grandfather in England? He was evacuated on October 24. There is a good chance that he was first briefly treated in a surgical post in the Nieuwpoort area, then transferred by train to Calais and from there by boat to England. The port of Ostend was already in the hands of the German occupier.

We contacted among others The British Red Cross, The Imperial War Museum, The Bromley Historic Collections, Workhouses, The Chislehurst Society and Lost Hospitals of London. Where possible we sent the postcard 'Wounded Belgian Soldiers...' with the question of where this photo could be located somewhere in England - perhaps near London.

Additionally we were looking for information on websites as Britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk, theremembranceline.org.uk and Kentonline.co.uk. related literature became reviewed: Creswick, P. et al., *Kent's Care for the wounded*, London, 1915; Walker, J., *The British Red Cross in the Bromley area 1910-1919*, Bromley, 1979; Bilbrough, E.M., *My War Diary 1914-1918*, London, 2014; Friel J. & Swaine A., *Secret Chislehurst*, Gloucestershire, 2015 and Allen T. et al., *Chislehurst through time*, Gloucestershire, 2013. In the magazine *The Clock Tower* (Friends of Medway Archives) we were able to publish our grandfather's story, together with a call for more concrete information. We could count on the help of Yvonne Van der Kemp, A girlfriend from Kemzeke with English roots.

## Chislehurst

In the first reactions it was pointed out to us that no fewer than 20,000 Belgian soldiers had arrived in England for care in the period October-November 1914. Hundreds of emergency hospitals were set up in a short time. Our search was not going to be easy!

March 7, 2021 - a breakthrough: in response to a photo we sent, we received from Peter Higginbotham (Workhouses) next message: *'I can identify the location as Chislehurst. There seem to have been several WW1 hospitals in the town.'* Also at 7 March confirmed Heather Johnson (The Northport Historical Society): *'Success - the property is Hornbrook House, Chislehurst High Street, in the London Borough of Bromley. It does not exist now ... it is a car park.'*

On 9 March followed a second confirmation from Veronica Chambers, webmaster of Hospitals of London Ezitis.Myzen.co.uk (Lost): *'Hornbrook House - this one: Hornbrook Auxiliary Hospital, High Street, Chislehurst, Kent BR7 5AB. Hornbrook Auxiliary Hospital opened mid-October with 50 beds in Hornbrook House, a former prep school owned by the Roman Catholic Sisters of Mercy. The house was demolished around 1970. Its site is now a municipal car park - Hornbrook House Car Park.'*



*Photo received from Joanna Friel, mentioning Chislehurst.*

On March 26 we received a message from Joanna Friel, Chairman of the Chislehurst Society: *'We have this image in our collection.' - a very similar photo with automobiles, dated November 11, 1914 and stating the location: Chislehurst!* So it is Chislehurst, located in London Borough of Bromley, Greater London, near Greenwich!



*A group of Belgian soldiers posing in front of a facade, with a nurse in the front row. And yes, in the second row on the far left we recognize our grandfather.*