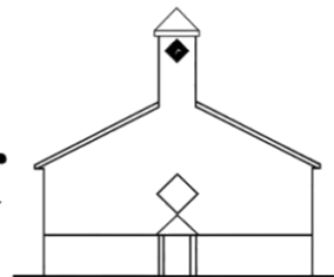


The Clock Tower



Issue Number 76: November 2024
£2.00; free to members

The Friends of Medway Archives
Excepted Charity registration number XR92894

25 Years of CityArk!



In October, we gathered at the Medway Archives Centre to celebrate 25 years of CityArk, Medway's ground-breaking online research resource. We were delighted that its architect, Stephen Dixon was able to be there (front row second from left). Also invited were MAC staff past and present, FOMA members and volunteers, plus the Mayor of Medway, Councillor Marian Nestorov and his wife, Mrs Liubov Nestorov. Stephen Dixon tells the story on page 9.

ALSO INSIDE

The Live Bait Squadron: Commemorations and New Beginnings – see page 15.

Heritage heroes, the Arches Local group, reinstate the Driver Fountain! See page 20.

25 Years of CityArk



Stephen Dixon, and the Mayor of Medway, Councillor Marian Nestorov peruse the extraordinary array of documents on display.

Above left: Paul Cowell, (Head of Culture and Libraries, Medway Council) introduced the evening: “... a big thank you to Stephen Dixon, Archivist here from 1990 until 2008 for his work recording the history of the centre, and more particularly, CityArk. ...Rochester upon Medway City Council was the only district council to run an archives service when it opened in April 1990 – so that was a first and an achievement to be proud of.”



Ian Smith, Brenda Paternoster, the Mayor, Councillor Marian Nestorov and his wife, Mayoress Mrs Liubov Nestorov.



Right: Cllr Nina Gurung, (Cabinet Member for Heritage, Culture and Leisure) closed the welcoming speeches, thanking “Archivists, past and present ... Stephen Dixon, ... Alison Cable, ... Elspeth Millar, [and] ... our current Archivist, Sarah Trim-West, ... with her assistance dog Poppy.” Nina also thanked FOMA, all the volunteers and donors, who, together with the work of everyone at the Medway Archives Centre “contribute to community cohesion, giving people a sense of place, and improving health and well-being.” More on CityArk on page 9.

Photographs: Spencer Trim-West and Amanda Thomas.

Chairman's Letter

Elaine Gardner



I can't believe we are nearly at the end of the year and I'm writing this for the last *Clock Tower* of 2024.

I am looking forward to our final talk of the year, *A Medieval Christmas* by Toni Mount on November 22 at our usual venue, St Nicholas Church, Strood (see page 44 for details). This newsletter may or may not reach you by then, but our events are always listed on our website, Facebook page and Instagram - and our Editor, Amanda Thomas always sends reminders to members a few days beforehand, so I hope you don't or didn't miss it. It would be lovely to see more members come along to our events.

In September, Amanda Thomas and I attended the Live Bait 110th anniversary commemorations at the Historic Chatham Dockyard. You can read more about what happened on page 15. It is always lovely to see our friend Henk van der Linden and Amanda and I were delighted to meet up with him for dinner before the event took place. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Henk once again for his most kind donation of £100 that he gave to FOMA once again this year.

Back in October I went to a party at the Medway Archives Centre to celebrate 25 years of the online digital catalogue, CityArk. (see page 9). It gave me the chance to talk to a number of local councillors and Medway Council employees who have responsibilities for various aspects of the Medway Archives Centre (MAC). Any opportunity to emphasise the value of our archive and its staff and the support FOMA provides to MAC is always welcome, especially if I can persuade them to join!

Having just been to the post office to buy the stamps needed for posting *The Clock Tower* to our overseas members, I was horrified to discover the cost *per stamp* has gone up another 30p. Unlike the normal 2nd class stamps that don't have the value listed on them – so I can bulk buy before the next price rise – the overseas stamps have the cost clearly printed and must show the current rate. Thanks to the help of the committee and some of our members, we have managed to hand deliver over half of the distributed copies and only 50 now go in the post. A number of our members collect their copy when visiting MAC which also helps. We know that most of our members do like to sit and read a printed copy rather than look at a screen, but Amanda does give instructions to enable you to print your copy as a booklet just like the version we send out. If you are happy to do this or collect your copy when passing MAC, please let me know. **It would also help costs if overseas members could please specify their reading preference – see below.**

Back in April at the AGM, Jean Skilling handed over the reins of the membership secretary to Ian Smith who joined the FOMA committee. Sadly, Ian has recently had to give up his role following unforeseen personal circumstances, so we are now looking for another member to take on the role and join us on the committee. It is not an arduous task and most of the work is when renewals are completed in the early part of the year, and of course there is a committee meeting once every two months. If you think you can help, please make contact with myself or one of the committee members listed at the back of *The Clock Tower*. I would like to thank Ian and wish him well for the future.

Finally, may I send you all my very best wishes for Christmas and the New Year!



The FOMA stand at the Medway History Showcase on 15 October at the Royal Engineers Museum.

Attention Overseas Members!

At the 2024 FOMA AGM it was agreed to increase the cost for annual overseas membership as the postage for *The Clock Tower* is now **£2.60** anywhere in the world for our 100g limit.

Overseas members have two options from 2025:

increase your annual membership to £18 to include a posted printed copy of *The Clock Tower*
or

remain at the £12 annual membership and download your copy from the website.

Please let FOMA Chairman, Elaine Gardner know your preference AS SOON AS POSSIBLE at emgardner@virginmedia.com

Medway Archives Centre Collections Care Closure

Please note the Medway Archives Centre will be closed from Monday, 23 December 2024 to Saturday 11 January 2025, re-opening on Monday, 13 January 2025.



Welcome, Natasha!

At the end of August, Natasha Beazleigh was appointed the new Archive Assistant at the Medway Archives Centre. Natasha is passionate about history and has for many years been researching her family tree. Natasha adds, “I am a member of English Heritage, and as well as exploring my own genealogy I am also interested in local history, so I am very excited to be an Archives Assistant at MAC as this is truly my dream job!”



A very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year !

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. Here's a look at what we've been up to ...

As well as providing our public in-person service at the centre, this last three months we have also replied to over 200 emailed enquiries and completed paid research for customers who cannot visit. Our Archive Assistants have also been involved in other work behind the scenes, including retrievals from the strongroom, preparing for events, creating social media posts, designing posters, repackaging and listing documents, and much more.

Partnerships and collaborative working are a fundamental part of our work at MAC. Staff visited Rochester Prison to meet the team with a view to planning future shared projects, and Temple Manor where we had a detailed look at the building and its history with Jeremy Clarke from the Guildhall Museum. We were also invited to the Historic Dockyard to meet the team and learn about their archive collections, library and conservation studio.

We are very excited to have received a donation from former Labour Kent County Councillor Roderick 'Rod' Helps. Mr Helps was very active in the Gillingham Labour party, serving throughout the 1970s and 1980s as the party chairman, secretary, treasurer and press officer at various times. This is not your ordinary collection of political papers, as in addition to being a councillor and politician, Mr Helps was greatly interested in the history of North Kent politics, specifically he seems to have been interested in the people that made up his constituency. This means that Mr Helps did not only record Labour Party history but took pains to record events and collect items relating to all the parties that operated in North Kent. This collection dates from the 1930s to the 1980s and consists mostly of Labour party material followed closely by Conservative party material, with the SDP-Liberal Alliance (now known as the Liberal Democrats) and the Greens trailing behind. This collection consists of seven boxes and fills a much-needed hole in our archive and we hope that once the collection is catalogued it will be of great interest.

Our busy outreach and events programme continues, and we must thank those of you who kindly donated some beautiful vintage tablecloths for our 'tea and chat' sessions - this is just one of the many ways FOMA members have supported us over these three months. We were also helped at the sessions by our volunteers who welcomed visitors, chatted and provided refreshments. Thank you everyone!

Medway Council was the first local authority to provide an on-line catalogue and on 18 October we celebrated 25 years of CityArk. To mark the occasion, we held an evening event attended by the Medway Mayor and Madam Mayoress, Medway Councillors, including our Portfolio Holder, previous Archivists, members of the FOMA committee and our volunteers. Our guests were offered behind-the-scenes tours plus a chance to view 25 treasures from our collections. You can read more about the event on page 2, and the history of CityArk on page 9.

Our *Homeward Bound* exhibition has now closed at MAC but it continued its journey around various Medway Libraries. Our travelling exhibitions reach new audiences, promoting the history of Medway and the resources we hold here at the centre. The current exhibition *Innovation and Steam, the story of Aveling & Porter* is now on display in our foyer. This exhibition is part of our recent series of events and outreach relating to Thomas Aveling, which included a drop-in session and our presence at the recent Hoo Peninsula Heritage Festival. We also held a Saturday drop-in on the Hoo Peninsula on Saturday 2 November. Our recent Saturday drop-ins included *Medway's Prisons and Prison Hulks*, and we were thrilled to welcome local author and historian Ralph Allison who signed copies of his recent book *Borstal: A History of Rochester Prison*.

As part of the *Textus Roffensis* celebrations over the summer, staff at Rochester Cathedral invited us to host a table in the nave. This gave us the opportunity to chat to visitors and promote our services and collections. We had a busy day, chatting to local families and international visitors, and we even practised our French! There was lots of interest in old maps of Rochester and other resources we had taken along with us from our outreach collection, and we were delighted to recruit a new MAC volunteer and strengthen our links with the cathedral.

The Child-Friendly Medway team has organised many events for children and young people over the past year. We were pleased to be able to host a mini-exhibit activity for their *Magical Creature Trail*, which was part of Festival 2024. This free project drew in local families to the centre for a fun afternoon during the school summer holidays.



One of the magical creatures in our archive viewing room!

The theme for this year's Heritage Open Days was routes, networks and connections. We held two events and kicked off with a free drop-in about Will Adams. We were pleased to welcome Sue Haydock who brought both her extensive knowledge of the life of the famous 16th century explorer and some fascinating exhibits to complement the resources held at MAC.

Our second Heritage Open Days event was our drop-in *Focus on... Medway's Tunnels*. This event gave visitors the chance to learn more about the hidden history beneath our feet. The drop-in was supported by MAC volunteer Tony Gray who had taken many photographs of the tunnels in Medway for us and has produced a leaflet for anyone interested in learning more.

We were invited to Gordon Children's Academy in Strood for their 125th anniversary celebrations. With MAC Archivist Sarah Trim-West's permission, we took along a 19th century school log book together with historic maps of Strood, books and pamphlets. We were busy all day, and people were amazed to see how Strood has changed over time.



Chris de Coulon Berthoud invigilating the first school log book at the Gordon Road Academy celebrations.

The local U3A lunch club enjoyed a morning with us before heading off to share a meal together. They had a behind-the-scenes tour and a chance to see a selection of our treasures, which included a top-secret World War Two plan, a register listing deaths from the plague, and a workhouse register. These events help us reach new audiences, and some visitors plan to make a return visit to learn more or attend our events.

On the 15 October many of you will have seen us at the Medway History Showcase which was hosted by the Royal Engineers Museum. Together with our colleagues at Kent Archives and Elaine Gardner from FOMA, and alongside other local history societies and organisations, we enjoyed promoting our collections and services to visitors. This great event is becoming a regular date in our diary and is growing from strength to strength.

The National Lottery Heritage Fund named Medway as one of nine places who will benefit from £200 million of investment as part of their Heritage Places initiative (see *The Clock Tower*, Issue 72, November 2023). We are supporting a number of people making applications to Heritage Place National Lottery for funding and look forward to working with those whose applications are successful.

Each year we have enquiries from students hoping to pursue a career in archives management. Sarah Trim-West has provided students with the opportunity to shadow her and has given advice and guidance on routes into the profession. The experience offers budding archivists an insight into Sarah's role here at Medway Archives Centre and helps to develop the archivists of the future.

In conclusion, I would 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. For this report we are highlighting one of our volunteer projects to list the names of the complainants and defendants in some of our Chatham Police Court records from the 1820s -1870s (references PS/NA/16-22). Our volunteers Tony Gray, Olivia Read, Andrew Daniels and Pauline Weeds have all been busily listing the complainants' and defendants' names, together with the date of their appearance at court and the charge. If you think your ancestors may have been a victim of crime or may have had a brush with the law, then please do get in touch and we can search the indexes for you. Please note this project is ongoing, and the indexes will eventually be publicly available.

Finally, a big thank you to the FOMA committee and members for all their support at our events. Not only do they work hard promoting our services and collections, but did you know they also purchase items for us via local and online auctions, as well as contributing to or purchasing specialist equipment for us? We appreciate all FOMA's support in helping to preserve Medway's history for future generations.

CityArk 1999-2024

Stephen Dixon

Archivist to Rochester upon Medway City Council 1990-1993, City Archivist of Rochester upon Medway 1993-1998 and Borough Archivist, Medway Council 1998-2008.



Anyone around the world who has roots in the Medway Towns will have used CityArk at some point in the last 25 years as an aid to compiling their family tree. Medway Council was the first local authority to publish an online catalogue of this sort, and today CityArk retains its unique position as an exemplary research resource – not just for family historians – as it is added to and improved.

On the evening of Friday 18 October, we gathered at the Medway Archives Centre to celebrate CityArk (see the front cover and page 2). We were delighted that Stephen Dixon was able to join us, and to follow is his account of the history of the archive.

Introduction

October 2024 marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the publication of CityArk on the Internet. This article explains the context in which CityArk was conceived and looks at the steps that led to its pioneering development.

CityArk, whose successor in terms of publicly searchable digital content and staff collection management is now the Medway Archives Centre's online catalogue, was the creation of the only district council to operate an archives service in the UK, Rochester upon Medway City Council. I use the term catalogue above loosely. Strictly speaking the term catalogue refers to a simple sequential ordering, such as in auctioneering. The main archival finding aids, known as descriptive lists, whether manual or electronic, are arranged hierarchically.

The *City* in the name CityArk referred to the City Council while *Ark* referred to both the archives and having all the archival collections on board, figuratively speaking. The name was coined by Michael Moad, the City Council's Museum Curator and Head of Heritage whose brigade of services included archives, of which he was supportive. Despite the change of name and system architecture the new solution preserves the original function, structure and content of the original CityArk solution even after twenty-five years. It seems appropriate to mark the anniversary and review the development and significance of CityArk.

Background

Rochester upon Medway City Archives (or Medway Area Archives Office/Medway Archives Centre in Kent County Council usage) was opened in April 1990 by Michael Roper, Keeper of the Public Records and Rt. Rev. Dr. Michael Turnbull, Bishop of Rochester. The first qualified, professional archivist employed was Helen Ford, 1987-1989, who laid out the new premises and brought in the first collections. I succeeded Helen in February 1990.*

The three staff of the archives (myself the archivist, a senior archives assistant and an archives assistant) during the period 1990-1998 were on the payroll of Kent County Council (KCC). In theory, therefore, the new local archives service formed part of Kent Archives in Maidstone. This was both to satisfy the Public Record Office's (PRO) policy of opposing the proliferation of new local government record offices and the City Council's policy of limiting the size of its workforce. The PRO's policy was rather fatuous and arguably not even mandatory under the Local Government (Records) Act 1962, in addition to which the three salaries were recharged by KCC to the City Council anyway. (The above Act permissively created county councils as archives authorities but in theory didn't prevent district councils also from operating archives services). The irony that CityArk emerged from a district council cannot be understated in these circumstances.

The new archive service and its staff were exclusively funded by the City Council which also operated the service, housed it on their Civic Centre premises in Strood and installed and maintained the plant, equipment and security systems. Unusually for a local government record office, at least to the mind of an archivist with a background in local government like me, most of the shelf run was composed of local government collections. Longer established local government record offices predominantly hold collections from outside local government. These core collections had been generated by the City Council and its predecessor authorities whose members and senior officers had grappled for decades with the problems of the future long-term storage of and access to the collections. Other locally relevant collections were transferred from Kent Archives to create a fully local archives service in time for the opening with some collections following later. The Dean and Chapter of Rochester archives were transferred in 1992.

The independent operation of the City Council's archives during the period from its launch in 1990 to the inauguration of Medway Council in 1998 and the development of CityArk in particular demonstrated the capabilities and potential of at least one district council in relation to curating its documentary heritage. Retrospectively, some senior officers of the City Council took the view they should have opted for a fully independent archives service from the outset, not reliant on KCC for nominal supervision.

Finding Aids and the Wider Archival Context

Whilst undergoing preparation during the period 1987-1989 and at the time of opening in 1990, the archive service was equipped entirely with manual finding aids and accessions records, the former of which were intended to be accessible to the researching public and the latter of which were maintained by the archivist behind the scenes as part of collection management. This was typical of all archives services everywhere at the time regardless of sector or type of governing body.

The public finding aids comprised traditional manual descriptive lists discrete to individual collections and global manual personal names, place-names and subject card indexes entered up from these lists, again the norm throughout record offices everywhere. These were accessible to the public only in person in the searchroom or in the case of duplicate lists, if researchers were more enterprising, via the National Register of Archives. In a few cases, offices around the country had experimented with the use of the clumsy technology then available for the creation of simple in-house searchable databases, ideal for single record series such as wills.

The manual finding aids in use in Medway Archives were a combination of those transferred from Kent Archives Office and (all based on classification schemes) and locally produced ones for collections that had been deposited direct. I tended not to use the classification scheme approach, except where I was complementing an existing collection list compiled according to such a scheme. An example of lists transferred from Maidstone is those of parish records, which of course accompanied the parish records themselves. These parish records lists were compiled according to a British Records Association classification scheme, which like KCC's other classification schemes and my own non-classification scheme-based arrangement methods, lent itself to CityArk's hierarchical capabilities.

Medway Archives had accessions records, for internal staff use only, comprising alphabetical depositor index and four accessions registers, one for accessions 1987-1989, a second for most deposits (DE series) 1990 onwards, the third for small and miscellaneous accessions (M series) 1990 onwards (each of these three applied to deposits from external organisations) and the fourth for modern records (MR) transfers (i.e. non-current City Council records) also from 1990 onwards. Thus all public finding and staff collection management systems were traditional manual ones and served as the only means of staff or public access to collections until 1995 when CityArk Phase I, Part 1 came online, although all the manual accessions records and lists continued to be maintained, added to with printouts and used alongside CityArk after 1995, to ensure a manual choice and backup.

Initial Moves Towards Automation

The process by which the above manual systems became automated was both planned and organic.

During the early years of the service, from 1990 to 1995, Jenny Sivyver, Archives Assistant, did the typing up of my descriptive lists using an electric typewriter containing memory and small display. The draft lists took the form of my pencil draft, handwritten lists made up of A5 listing dockets interspersed with level and section headings that gave hierarchical structure to the lists. As I settled into my role, I discovered the City Council had a Secretariat section which undertook typing work from all around the council at no cost. In order to relieve Jenny of her typing burden I enquired if Secretariat could take on the typing of my lists which their head, Judy Squires, agreed to do. Jenny was freed to do work more traditionally in keeping with an archives assistant, very important in an increasingly busy and understaffed service.

The word processing system used by Secretariat was UNIPLEX, a very clunky system using a mainframe computer the size of an estate car although it was soon replaced with one merely the size of a car engine. Remarkably, there was a market for the old mainframe when it was sold. The mainframe hosted various council systems which were served out to dumb terminals throughout the council except the archives, which at that time had not been automated. Perhaps archives was deliberately overlooked because of misconceptions about a lack of modernity, or more likely because we were simply still new. In any case, an archivist and head of repository has to be an advocate for adopting new technologies or he fails in his job.

The Idea

The archives profession abounded in ideas for automation. The professional literature was sometimes full of incomprehensible articles on the subject, couched in language only IT gurus could understand. One could hardly fail to be over-awed and convinced of advances in the record offices so fortunate to employ archivists with such spellbinding knowledge. However, strangely, nothing seemed to be produced in real terms except possibly in very few cases local area networks (LANs).

I had no training in IT or word processing but realised all lists previously passed to the Secretariat for processing into UNIPLEX were not only accessible to Secretariat staff for printing out and making corrections, the content was also theoretically accessible to archives staff and the public. This was quickly and easily confirmed by Judy Squires. Only some work to rearrange the content (comprising lists of discrete collections or 'archive groups') into hierarchical order (starting at the top with management groups or categories of collections) was required, using the familiar folder, sub folder and file structure of word processing that so conveniently lends itself to archival arrangement. The content could then be made accessible to archives staff who would be given read and write access and to the public, who would be given read-only access in the searchroom. That was the theory, and it is worth emphasising any system suitable for archives use *had* to enable hierarchical arrangement and structuring.

Automation, whatever form it took from this point, would have to offer firstly the searching all content for words and phrases with or without date parameters, i.e. globally within the database, instead of using a card index; or selectively searching likewise but within selected hierarchical levels of the database; and thirdly scrolling a list on screen in the same way one could browse a manual list in the searchroom for a given collection, with printing options in each case.

CityArk Phase I, Part 1

In 1995 I arranged for six terminals to be installed with staff access to the archives area of the mainframe's UNIPLEX content. Each terminal was a soiled hand-me-down monitor and keyboard whose appearance was compensated for by the attractive screen and text colours since mainly lost to modern computer users. At least we were not charged for them. I underwent training in the use of UNIPLEX to enable me to query the content of the archives area in the mainframe and upload new content independently of the Secretariat.

One of the terminals was set up as read-only in the searchroom to give public access to the archives area of the mainframe, as planned, requiring some public use of UNIPLEX commands in turn necessitating the preparation and use of a manual written by me, and supported by staff providing brief verbal instructions. Basic though the approach and technology were, the system worked. Nevertheless, public access to original documents was still by means of traditional manual ordering, requiring the researcher to complete a triplicate document request slip containing the document reference number supplied in his search results, which was then handed to staff to retrieve the original document.

I vividly recall one instance where the early version of CityArk produced beneficial results that could not have been achieved using traditional manual finding aids. A consultant working on a project to repair the river wall underneath Rochester Castle wanted to know if we held any records of the 19th century engineering work that had been done there, to save an expensive and invasive investigation. Using CityArk, we identified the relevant records, and the consultant cheerfully declared we had saved his company £20,000. This kind of customer interaction confirmed that automation could not only duplicate the traditional manual methods of document identification, it could also do so much more quickly when the alternative could be the daunting prospect of hours or days searching manual finding aids. One wonders how many more cost-saving projects could be undertaken now that online archives databases are commonplace, if only business users would use record offices and online finding aids along similar lines. However, in my time in the archives profession in the local government sector, I witnessed a complete loss of professional and business users. Until the 1990s solicitors, architects, surveyors, engineers and others were frequent users of record offices. These users entirely gave way to family historians, genealogists and local historians with even academic historians dropping off. Consequently, family historians and genealogists have become the main beneficiaries of online content.

CityArk Phase I, Part 2

In 1995 the City Council decided to adopt Windows 95 and its WP solution would be Word 6. This potentially left all its UNIPLEX data inaccessible. The City Council succeeded in tracking down one of the original UNIPLEX programmers who agreed to convert UNIPLEX data into Word 6. Across the City Council staff rejoiced in having a *wysiwyg* (what you see is what you get) system for the first time. A necessary part of this process was the replacement of terminals with desktop PCs. Fortunately, this was done at no cost to local budgets and similar access to CityArk was enabled as before, that is, from a master computer via a network. However, before too long, corporate IT withdrew firstly both the master computer (and network solution) and secondly support for Word 6 as the corporate word processing solution, replacing it with independent staff PCs backed up centrally. For an interval, this involved IT making a very uncomfortable exception for the archives in allowing continued use of Word 6 until 1997, supported by an understanding external contractor.

For a period of several months 1997-1998 CityArk content was inaccessible except locally to archives staff using individual PCs. Fortunately, out of this bleak picture new hope emerged. Angela Waite, City Council IT Contracts Officer, later Head of IT for Canterbury City Council, was at that time arranging for the setting up of the first City Council website with a company called Network Advantage, made up of young graduates of the University of Kent at Canterbury. In discussions with them she mentioned our loss of service (CityArk Phase I, Part 2) and they immediately suggested an Intranet as the solution. The suggestion was worked up into a formal proposal and approved by the council's IT managers.

The small archives budget could not have borne the cost. Fortuitously, Michael Moad had an underspend of about £6,200 and with these funds allocated, programming began in late 1997. The Word 6 data was easily converted into html by Network Advantage with the programming of the new CityArk being undertaken principally by Andrew Newberry who thereafter became our main point of contact with the company. The cost of the server, £2,000, was contributed by Angela Waite.

CityArk Phase II, Part 1

In early 1998 the solution was installed by Network Advantage and tested and trialled by the company and me with only minor adjustments necessary. On 1 April 1998 Medway Council unitary authority was inaugurated, inheriting CityArk Phase II from the City Council. By the intranet trial stage (May 1998 to October 1999), nearly all existing manual lists had been converted into electronic format for cross-loading into CityArk Phase II. This had been achieved over three years by a combination of the

Secretariat typing up my draft manual lists into UNIPLEX, the Secretariat typing up existing lists (including those that had been transferred from KCC) into UNIPLEX, by the corporate conversion of UNIPLEX data into Word 6, and last of all by me laboriously copying and pasting the Word 6 data into the intranet system's inputting fields, thereby creating the html content of CityArk Phase II.

All current listing work by this time was being done direct by me onto the Intranet system. However, I am glad to say a second archivist joined me for 14 ½ months during my tenure at Medway, proving an archivist other than myself could learn and use the system. This was Nicola Waddington, who entered her list of the remaining unlisted portion of the family, estate and business archives of the Earls of Darnley of Cobham Hall into CityArk. This project was funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund as part of the Cobham Ashenbank Management Scheme, overseen by Gravesham Borough Council towards the mitigation of the local Channel Tunnel Rail Link works.

In May 1998 the CityArk intranet (CityArk Phase II, Part 1) was launched without fanfare, using a desktop in the searchroom for public access and desktop PCs around the office for archives staff. CityArk was also accessible to all council staff on their own desktops, in other words the intranet solution applied not only to the archives office but council wide. The system comprised a front end or read-only interface offering a query tool to which were added appealing features such as interactive maps and a selection of images of interesting documents; and a back end which was read and write for staff, enabling the creation of the hierarchical structure and entering of content. The staff collection management facilities included a secure area for modern records management, though this function was never fully implemented.

The query tool featured a drop-down menu arranged by management group and collections within management groups, enabling discrete searches within these levels and sub levels, otherwise the search function defaulted to global. It was also possible to produce scrollable lists for individual collections, corresponding to traditional paper descriptive lists. We termed these 'collection reports'.

CityArk Phase II, Part 1, or Intranet only service, operated in the searchroom and from staff workstations from May 1998 to October 1999. At this point it is worth observing this period was probably the first experience the archives using public anywhere in the UK had of internet technology for interactive access to archival collections.

CityArk Phase II, Part 2

As the trial period had been successful, I obtained permission for CityArk to be published online with the address <http://cityark.medway.gov.uk> - which still works. On the night of 13/14 October 1999, Andrew Newberry published CityArk to the internet: I learned of the development from Andrew in the morning. The Internet Archive Wayback Machine first crawled CityArk on 28 November 1999, however, staff use of CityArk using the intranet continued as before and changes to the intranet version were updated to the internet server daily.

CityArk was the first piece-level, hierarchical archives database or catalogue to be published online, i.e. on the internet in the public sector in the UK. This was CityArk Phase II, Part 2. The Public Record Office's ProCat system (now re-named Discovery) and Essex Record Office's Seax (now Essex Archives Online) were published online a little later, in early 2000. Record offices until then had usually only headline or summary descriptions of their holdings online and many had no online presence at all.

Dr. Norman James of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts (later subsumed into the National Archives) noted CityArk conformed to the basic requirements of the International Standard for Archival Description (General) (ISAD(G)). He also expressed approval that collections that had been accessioned only, i.e. those that formed a backlog of collections awaiting listing, were included in the database as searches of this area of the database this would at least inform researchers of the existence of collections, even if they weren't always physically accessible. The total cost of the programming and hardware amounted to £8,200, a small amount even by the standards of the day and bearing in mind for comparison Kent County Council's proposed initial solution for Kent Archives, a LAN named InHerit, had cost at least £120,000 before being cancelled.

Subsequent Developments

Subsequent upgrades and improvements included reprogramming CityArk to enable its content to be directly visible to internet search engines. The first image content was published in 2001, starting with the Borstal parish registers and thereafter parish registers for the north-west of Kent alphabetically in a project called *Medway Ancestors*, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. These were the first English or Welsh parish registers ever to be published online. The image content was created by re-filming the registers, digitising the new film and Derek Moore, Senior Archives Assistant, Cindy O'Halloran, Archives Assistant, and I laboriously uploaded the image files to their associated flat html files. Another significant upgrade was converting html to XML. The imagebase was expanded to include many new series of records including municipal burial registers and a movie-base of videos was also added.

Reflections

From 2008, and in my next role as chief archivist of Essex County Council, I was able to develop Essex Record Office's Seax system along similar lines, completing the coverage of parish registers for the historical county of Essex and making Seax's content visible direct to internet search engines. I was able to go a stage further than I had in Medway, by introducing the first archives paywall in the local government sector in 2011 in a project called *Essex Ancestors* which comprised images of the Essex parish registers, this time with investment funding by Essex County Council. Needless to say, the name *Essex Ancestors* was a follow-up to my *Medway Ancestors* project. I am pleased to have covered both sides of the Thames estuary in this way!

Twenty-five years on, the architecture of the solution has changed as I knew it would but the content has been continuously available for that period, an astonishing quarter of a century. Medway Archives has for that period of time been continuously operating an online searchable, hierarchical and piece-level system longer than any other public sector archives institution. It sobers me to think that CityArk is now older than the most recent graduates of the archives training courses.

**For more on the history of the Medway Archives Centre, see The Clock Tower, Issue 31, August 2013, which celebrated the twentieth anniversary.*

The Live Bait Squadron: Commemorations and New Beginnings

Amanda Thomas



It is hard to believe it was ten years ago we commemorated the 100th anniversary of the sinking of the Live Bait Squadron. On 22 September 1914, at the start of World War One, Chatham's three cruisers: HMS *Aboukir*, *Hogue* and *Cressy* were sunk by the German U-boat *U9*. 1,459 men and boys perished in the space of a few hours in the North Sea, and 130 of them were from the Medway Towns. Many of them can be found in the FOMA De Caville Index which can be found on our website at foma-lsc.org/wwi/

On 21 September 2014, the then FOMA Chairman, Tessa Towner and I gathered with relatives of those who had died at the St. George's Centre, Pembroke Barracks, at the Historic Chatham Dockyard. This was the first day of commemorations in Chatham and The Hague, and the highlight of a very long journey for Henk van der Linden, our dear friend and FOMA life member. Henk is a Dutch economist who, in 2004, strayed into the war graves cemetery in the Dutch capital, The Hague. He was early for a meeting and had some time to spare, but it was this chance decision which caused Henk to discover the story of the Live Bait Squadron. Henk used to call this the start of *Our Road to Chatham*, and on the evening of 5 September 2024, his journey on that road finally came to an end with the decision to step down as head of the Live Bait Squadron Society, handing the baton to journalist and author, Stuart Heaver.

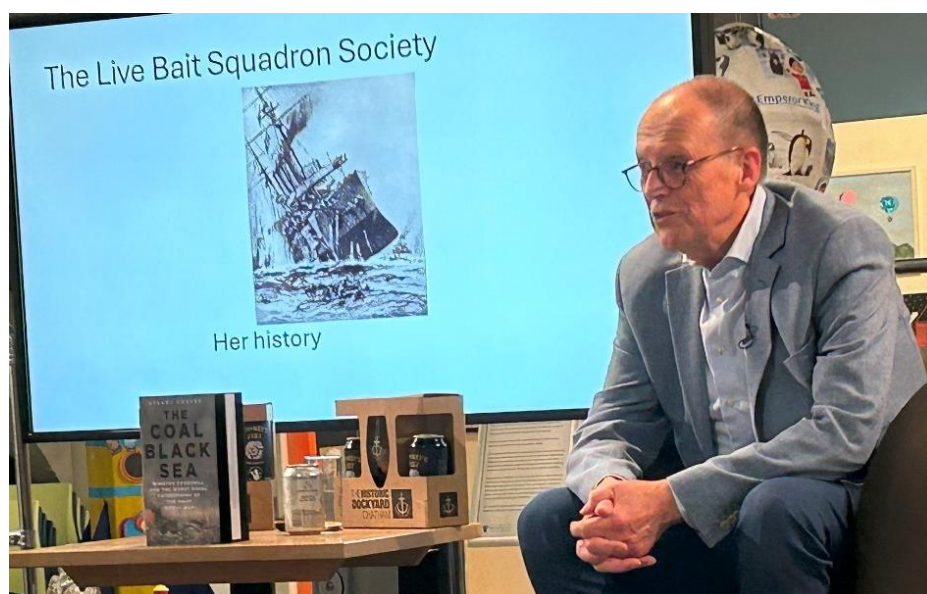
The 110th anniversary commemorations were necessarily tinged with some sadness. Tessa Towner was not well enough to be with us, though FOMA Chairman, Elaine Gardner was able to attend, and she had also taken part in the Chatham events in 2014. Other Squadron relatives were also too elderly to make the journey or had sadly died in the interim years. However, many were able to be there, and the Dockyard's Mess Deck Restaurant was absolutely packed. I was delighted to see Alice and Rob Barrigan who had played a key role in 2014 and whom we had met up with again in 2017 when Henk was presented in The Hague with the British Empire Medal (see *The Clock Tower*, Issue 46, May 2017).

In 2011, Alice Barrigan had contacted Henk regarding her ancestor, midshipman Duncan Stubbs, who had perished on board HMS *Aboukir* and whose remains have never been found. Alice's family had inherited Duncan Stubbs' sea chest which he had been prevented from taking on board the *Aboukir* as it was too large. The story of Stubbs and his friend W.H. Wykeham-Musgrave, known as Kit, has become well known. The 15-year-old cadets from Dartmouth Naval College survived all three sinkings only to be drowned attempting to save the life of another, older man. Stubbs' great nephew, Alice's son, Duncan Barrigan, was filmed back in 2014, diving down to the wrecks of the cruisers for the documentary made by Klaudie Bartelink, and which was shown at the St George's Centre during the 2014 commemorations. In addition, it was Alice's second cousin once removed, Richard Channon, R.N. retd. who recommended Henk for the British Empire Medal.

The 110th anniversary evening began with Paul Barnard, Chief Operating Officer at The Historic Dockyard Chatham, inviting Henk van der Linden to the stage. Henk sadly announced he would be stepping down as Chairman of the Live Bait Squadron Society, "a society that doesn't exist. Its members are the dead men of the cruisers. ... I represent these men: they were forgotten." Henk proceeded to tell his story, which, though familiar to many of us, was lovely to hear again, and concluded with the fact that his more recent battle with cancer is now over and he is once again well. He reiterated that the story of the cruisers is "the people's history" and that he is a "story collector", given how he has always been more interested in the effect of historical events on people and their subsequent experiences. Henk does not see himself as a conventional historian.



Paul Barnard, Chief Operating Officer at The Historic Dockyard Chatham.



Henk van der Linden introduces the commemorations.

Henk reminded us that after the sinking of the cruisers in 1914, the Royal Navy had said that the men who died were *missing at sea* and not *killed in action* which meant they had never had a memorial service. As we know, it was by chance that Henk had discovered the story, but the journey to the 2014 commemorations was also possible thanks to the help of others, particularly the descendants of the victims. However, we are proud to say that Tessa Towner and FOMA played a very large part as well. Thanks to these initial efforts, in 2012, around 80 relatives representing 20 cruiser crew members attended the presentation of Henk's book, *Live Bait Squadron* at the St. George's Centre, and the Turning the Page Ceremony at Rochester Cathedral (see *The Clock Tower*, Issue 28, November 2012.) It was at this event that Henk promised everyone he would organise a proper commemoration for 2104. Henk recalled that he had seldom seen his wife, Toos so angry, as she knew that Henk's life from then on would be dominated by only one thing. It was at this point that Henk had also decided to form the Live Bait Squadron Society. Many, many people helped to make the 100th commemorations happen, and Henk singled out Ann West, then Deputy Lieutenant of Kent for her unfailing faith and help.



Alice and Rob Barrigan with Henk van der Linden.

We were all delighted to be able to watch a film of the commemorative ceremony which – in large part thanks to Ann - took place at the Historic Dockyard on 22 September 2014. It brought back vivid memories of the day and was as moving to watch on screen as it had been back then. Sadly, the film did not include events at Den Haag Municipal Cemetery on Wednesday 24 September. Many of those who had attended the events at Chatham, including Tessa and me, travelled to Holland. This is how I described that afternoon back in 2014 (*The Clock Tower*, Issue 36, November 2014):

‘... we were all aware that the light had dimmed and the rain had begun to fall outside. However, no matter, as Henk van der Linden was on hand with umbrellas for everyone and we slowly progressed outside for the laying of the wreaths. The rain added to the sombre atmosphere as wreath after wreath was brought to the spot where many of men of the Live Bait Squadron now lie: wreaths from the people of Britain, the Netherlands, from Germany, and of course the wreath from Medway, which had been brought from Chatham. Then with bunches of flowers came the descendants of the fallen, and perhaps most poignantly, the Weddigen family. We stood in the rain for the *Last Post* and contemplated the past few days as silence fell.’

The Weddigen family were the descendants of Kapitänleutnant Otto Weddigen, captain of the U-boat U9, which had fired the torpedoes at the cruisers on the morning of 22 September 1914.

Following the film and a break, the Dockyard’s Paul Barnard introduced Stuart Heaver, a formal naval officer, journalist and author of *The Coal Black Sea*. Apart from Henk’s, this is one of the few books which has explored the story of the Live Bait Squadron. Henk later talked about the author Alan Coles who wrote several books about *incidents of betrayal* at sea, including *Three Before Breakfast* which relates the story of the three cruisers. It was more *incompetence* and betrayal that Stuart was to speak about. Despite the appalling loss of life and its dreadful impact on the families and communities affected, the Ministry of Defence has never designated the sinking of the cruisers as a naval action, which, Stuart added, is very unusual.

Like Henk, Stuart’s own involvement with the story came about through a series of coincidences. Whilst he has spent much of his working life in Hong Kong, home is Whitstable, and during a visit in 2014, Stuart’s cousin David suggested they visit Westleton in Suffolk. Here on the war memorial is the name of their great uncle, William John Potter who died on the *Cressy*. Another, David Spindler is remembered on the memorial and Stuart was intrigued as to why two men from the same place should have perished on board ship on the same day. A book in the local church gave the answer and his cousin David also mentioned what Henk was up to in Chatham.

Stuart decided to contact an old friend from the navy, Admiral Sir George Zambellas, who would later play a role at the Historic Dockyard during the September commemorations. Stuart discovered more and more and was struck by the affinity he felt with other descendants, wondering if their ancestors had been friends.



Stuart Heaver

He was deeply affected by the story and as a journalist thought there was probably a lot more to it, also realising the importance of understanding the events of 22 September 1914 *in context*. At the beginning of World War One, it had been thought this would be a war fought at sea and over by Christmas: no one had anticipated how events would pan out. Stuart read Alan Coles' book and noticed that following the sinkings, relatives didn't speak much about it. He wondered why, but also swiftly realised there had been "a massive cock-up" *and* there was only one person responsible: Winston Churchill.

The Court of Inquiry had subsequently deemed the sinkings *inevitable*. It happened close to the Dutch coast and there was no escort. It was Churchill who invented the name *Live Bait*. and perhaps this was a deliberate move to cover his own error of judgement. Stuart's research into how Churchill was involved in the cover-up is explained in *The Coal Black Sea*, and I won't spoil the outcome of his extraordinary research in this article. However, one of Churchill's ploys to deflect blame was to depict the crew as amateurs, which was simply not the case. Some 60 percent of those on board were members of either the Royal Fleet Reserves or the Royal Navy Reserves. These were highly competent, professional seamen, and the implication that they were to blame explained the feelings of *shame* shared by so many of their descendants. Stuart was also struck by the enormous grief of those left behind, augmented by the shock of the sinkings and the financial catastrophe suffered by so many of the crew's dependents left behind: wives and mothers struggling to cope. Compensation came late or not at all and in some communities orphanages were set up to relieve the burden on mothers unable to support their children. In Whitstable, where the loss was tremendous and where much of Stuart's research was undertaken, charity events were set up to help the widows, including a football match.

Stuart concluded with the question, "So, 110 years on, does the Live Bait Squadron still matter?" The sinkings are not a unique example of servicemen being sent off on a hopeless mission. Such stories need to be kept alive to raise awareness of how incompetence can manifest itself in those in power who believe they cannot possibly be wrong. Stuart praised Henk for having done such a brilliant job and once again pointed the finger of blame at Churchill who failed so profoundly: "He blamed those on board to protect his own vanity and reputation."

The evening concluded with a final presentation from Henk. “My main responsibility was to keep the memory alive,” he declared, adding, “and today I transfer in public this responsibility to my successor.” Thus, in a single moment, Henk passed this important baton to Stuart Heaver, who we know will keep that memory alive. Thank you, Henk, for doing such a remarkable job and for giving emotional closure to so many descendants of those brave men who died needlessly 110 years ago. I am, however, delighted to report that the next day, Henk and Stuart had lunch and Stuart persuaded Henk to remain as Chairman Emeritus of the Live Bait Squadron Society.

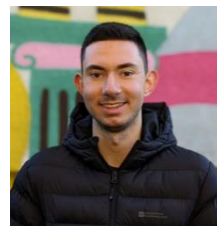
Photographs by Amanda Thomas.

You can read more about the 2014 100th anniversary commemorations of the sinking of the Live Bait Squadron in 2014 in The Clock Tower, Issue 36, November 2014.

The Driver Fountain returns to Luton on its 125th Anniversary

Arches Local

Arches Local (archeslocal.org.uk) is a resident-led organisation strengthening connections between people and public spaces in Chatham. Born out of the National Lottery-funded Big Local programme, the organisation is made up of a collective of ambitious local people, and can often be found curating public art, tree lining streets and shaping local policy. This article was supplied by Chairman, George Atzev (pictured).



A remarkable piece of Chatham's heritage has been brought back to its rightful home in the area it once proudly stood. The Driver Fountain was originally installed in front of the Luton Arches in 1899, donated by three-times mayor of Chatham, William Dawes Driver. This ornate monument was commissioned to celebrate the life of his late father, Joshua Driver, a highly respected and successful corn merchant, local politician and helper of those in need.



Undated photo of the Driver Fountain in front of the Luton Arches (centre). Credit: Medway History Group/Facebook

Made of Peterhead red and Aberdeen blue granite, the fountain was intended not just to serve the townspeople but also their horses, featuring three drinking basins and a trough. Standing around 4.4 metres tall and weighing over 7000kg, this impressive monument was designed by Charles Day, the borough surveyor, and manufactured by the Aberdeen-based firm Garden & Co. Behind the fountain was a grass enclosure where a row of poplar trees was planted.

Large crowds gathered at the Luton Arches for the grand unveiling ceremony on 4 October 1899, led by the MP for Chatham, Sir Horatio Davies. Amid cheers, he pulled the strings of the wrappings to unveil the fountain, and then drank a cupful of water, followed by the then Mayor, William Dawes Driver. Later in the day a celebratory lunch was held for politicians and community members at the now-demolished Queen's Hall.



Undated photo of a horse enjoying a light refreshment at the Driver Fountain. Credit: Medway History Group/Facebook

However, in 1961 a decision was made by Chatham Borough Council to remove the Driver Fountain from the Luton Arches due to plans to build a taxi rank in its place, which ironically never came to fruition. Local stonemasons Thomas Fowle & Sons were contracted to relocate the fountain to a corner of Chatham Cemetery, off Palmerston Road, which cost up to £75. Meanwhile, the granite horse trough was disposed of, despite various claims otherwise. In the process of relocating the fountain, the stonemasons removed all its plumbing and backfilled the cavities with concrete, sadly rendering it impossible to function as a water fountain again. For the next 63 years the Driver Fountain languished in a forgotten and neglected corner of the cemetery.

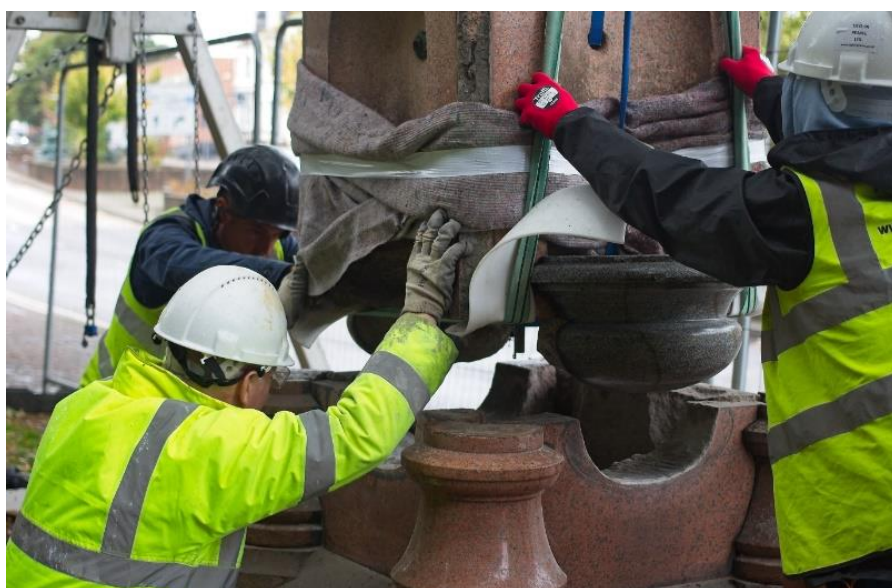


The Driver Fountain and bath house at the Luton Arches in around 1960. Credit: Medway Archives Centre/Facebook

The fountain's return to Luton has been no simple feat, beginning over a decade ago with a simple news article to try and prompt action, but to no avail. Despite several false starts, this year resident-led organisation Arches Local decided to make one final effort and approached the project with a fresh perspective. We commissioned Taylor Pearce, royal warrant-holding stonemasons, and Meristem Design, expert landscape designers, to bring this project to life.

Various relocation sites were considered, including its original location by the roundabout and a site by the pedestrian crossing on Chatham Hill, which was favoured by Medway Council during their relocation attempt some years ago. However, all options aside from the final chosen site proved unfeasible due to the extensive engineering works and implausible road closures necessary for safe reassembly.

Expert stonemasons Taylor Pearce using specialist equipment to assemble the relocated Driver Fountain. Credit: Arches Local



A section of the Driver Fountain being lifted into place by stonemasons Taylor Pearce. Photo: Jane Robb/Arches Local

Over the course of a week in September 2024, a team of stonemasons from Taylor Pearce cleaned, dismantled and relocated the monument to a leafy grass verge in New Road, some metres away from its original site. Colourful new planting by Meristem Design and an interpretation board, revealing the remarkable history of the monument, have also been added to complement the Driver Fountain at its new home.

In the same fashion of its 1899 opening, the monument was once again unveiled with a ceremony, taking place on 26 October 2024. Local school children helped pull a red cloth off the monument before a crowd of local residents, history enthusiasts and the Arches Local team, plus Robert Flood and Amanda Thomas of the Friends of Medway Archives.



The relocated Driver Fountain with new planting and an interpretation board. Credit: Jane Robb/Arches Local

Relocating the historic Driver Fountain on its 125th anniversary is yet another step in Arches Local's ongoing commitment to repairing Chatham's urban landscape. We believe that our shared spaces should be places where nature thrives, culture is celebrated, and communities come together.

Through the fountain's return to its rightful place, the legacy of both Joshua and William Driver will continue to be a part of Chatham's story for generations to come. It is a powerful reminder of the value in trusting communities to champion heritage in the streets they call home. This project celebrates not only the rich history of Chatham, our shared home, but also the perseverance and dedication of local people involved in bringing this iconic landmark back to life.

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

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

Part 2: The British Concrete Barges built during World War Two

In Part 1 of *A History of British Concrete Ships*, I provided an introduction to the history of concrete shipbuilding, and to the Medway connections of World War One, including one of the last surviving British concrete ships of the WWI era, *Violette*, built at Faversham, that now lies at Whitton Marine, Hoo. In Part 2, I will be covering the history of the 495 British concrete barges built during World War Two and explaining why so many still exist today on the Medway.

Ferro-Concrete Barges (FCBs)

During World War II, a shortage of steel led to a Ministry of Shipping (later the Ministry of War Transport) programme to construct Ferro-Concrete Barges (FCBs), needed for lighterage at the West Coast Emergency Ports, namely Liverpool, Manchester, Bristol, Firth of Clyde and South Wales. These FCBs were Stem-headed Open Barges, typically 84' long, 22'6" wide and 9'1" deep, with a loadline draught of 7'. They could carry around 170 tons of dry cargo of many types, including military equipment and ammunition, coal and wheat.

In late 1939, an initial trial order for 20 FCBs was placed with Thomas Lowe & Sons Ltd at Queensferry, Grays Ferro Concrete at Irvine and with Wates at Barrow-in-Furness. In May 1940, the order was extended to 40 barges, with 13 to be built by Thomas Lowe, nine by Grays and the remainder by Wates. The first FCB to be launched, F.B. 2 on 26th October 1940, was built by Grays.



FCB and Violette at Witton Marine, Richard Lewis.

By May 1943, orders for 120 FCBs had been placed, with 98 of these being built by Wates. They were used extensively on the Manchester Ship Canal (30+) and at Liverpool (60+), with most of the remainder being used at Bristol, and at South Wales ports by the Great Western Railway Company.

In September 1943, there was a large extension to the programme with a further 180 FCBs being ordered. Wates at Barrow-in-Furness received orders for a further 40 barges, and Tarran Industries in Hull also for 40 barges. At this same juncture, the requisitioning of Thames Lighters for use as Landing Craft had caused a shortage of open barges in the South East, and hence Wates received an order for 50 Stem-head Open Barges and 50 Swim-head Open Barges (preferred by the Thames Lightermen), to be built at West India Docks, London.

F.B. 121 to F.B. 170, the Stem-headed FCBs were completed between 17 April 1944 and 22 August 1944 and F.B. 171 to F.B. 220, the Swim-headed FCBs were completed between 12 September 1944 and 6 February 1945. They were managed by the Association of Master Lightermen & Barge Owners of the Port of London, and by the Port of London Emergency Committee. They were extremely unpopular with the Thames lightermen as they were heavy, 'brittle' and difficult to steer when compared to steel lighters. Ultimately, 295 FCBs were launched. There were to be 300, but the orders for F.B. 296 to F.B. 300 to built in Hull were cancelled and one FCB – F.B. 82 – was deployed for a special purpose, converted to become a prototype 'Petrol Barge'.

Petrol Barges

In late 1942, the idea of using concrete barges for a new purpose emerged. Stem-head Petrol Barges, also known as P.B.200s and Tank Barges, were designed to carry petrol, specifically for the purpose of carrying fuel to support the D-Day invasion force as part of the Overlord plan. Prototype Petrol Barge P.B. 1, completed in March 1943, was built by Wates at Barrow-in-Furness, utilising F.B. 82 as the 'chassis' with a concrete upper deck and bulkheads that formed watertight 'tanks' below. They had a capacity of approximately 180 tons of fuel.

The main production run of 200 Petrol Barges were ordered from Wates in London in April 1943. They were built in London as the location was much nearer to the intended invasion embarkation points and they were constructed at a rate of five per week, in the number range P.B. 2 to P.B. 201.

After the disastrous Exercise Jantzen at Tenby in Summer 1943, when the Petrol Barges broke their backs on the beach, and a sea trial to the Isle of Wight in October 1943 when one sank, the Petrol Barges were not trusted. Moreover, ultimately, they were not needed to carry fuel for D-Day due to the development of the 'CHANTs', 'Y' Tankers and 'Jerry Cans' as alternative means to deliver the fuel needed for the invasion. Indeed, by 18 September 1944, PLUTO started pumping fuel across the channel to supply the Allied forces. 200 Petrol Barges were no sooner built, than they became War Surplus. Effectively, so too did the 100 FCBs that had been built in London.

An analysis of aerial photographs of the Thames on 1 January 1945 (Google Earth Pro) suggests that two thirds of all the FCBs and PBs built in London were either moored on the Thames or were being stored at Ham Pits, a worked out gravel pit in Richmond. It seems likely that many Petrol Barges were towed to the Medway where a lot of navy vessels were stored during the war. Concrete barges needed to either continuously float, or rest on a flat muddy surface when the tide was out, so the Medway was suitable.

The Defence of Kent Project – Discovering and recording Kent's 20th Century Military and Civil Defences published by the Medway Military Research Group in February 2008, makes a single reference to the concrete barges being used as *decoys*: 'strings of concrete barges were anchored in the River Medway some of which still survive off Gillingham Strand.' For certain, after the end of the war, the Ministry of War Transport decided to *store* large numbers of these concrete Petrol Barges on the Medway, this fact being confirmed in documents discovered in the National Archives.

On 1 July 1945, the Petrol Barges were listed as 'For Disposal' and by 1946, they were being acquired by 'Medway entrepreneurs' to build quays and jetties. By December 1960, a Google Earth photograph of the area that developed into Gillingham Marina shows in excess of 40 Petrol Barges, there were 5 at Gillingham Strand, 14 at Port Werburgh and 5 at Strood Yacht Club. There were 23 FCBs at Bedlam's Bottom. Research suggests that certainly over 100 concrete barges were towed to the Medway during and after World War II and that as many as three quarters of these still exist today on the Medway.

Summary of The Medway Barges

Visits, and research, suggest that there are, today, as many as 75 visible concrete barges on the Medway and as such, the Medway has far and away the highest concentration of concrete vessels anywhere in the World.

Port Werburgh	14
Medway Bridge Marina	7
Hoo Sailing Barge Graveyard	2
Segas Sailing Club	1
Medway Cruising Club	8
Stargate Marine	7
Whitton Marine	6
Strood Yacht Club	6
Hoo Island	7
Fort Darnet	4
Backsore Marshes	10
Blue Sands Houseboat, Strood	1
Cuxton	1
Port Medway Marina	1
Total	75



Hoo Sailing Barge Graveyard, Richard Lewis.



Port Werburgh, Richard Lewis



Strood Yacht Club, Richard Lewis



Concrete barge houseboat at Stargate Marine, Richard Lewis.



Fort Darnet, Chloe Urbex.



Gillingham Strand, Chloe Urbex.



Hoo Sailing Barge Graveyard, Chloe Urbex.



*The Rainham Marshes showing the 16 Petrol Barges were placed there after the 1953 Great Flood.
Chloe Urbex.*

Additionally, a number of concrete barges, once present on the Medway have been broken up, buried or moved elsewhere. Notably, these were at Gillingham Marina, where at least 12, but probably more were buried when the Marina was developed, and at Whitewall Creek where at least five were broken up and buried. It is reported that a number of concrete barges were utilised in the development of Medway City Estate in the 1980s.

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.

Alfred Van Driessen's story was first published in the magazine, *d'Euzie*, 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 – see *The Clock Tower*, Issue 75, August 2024) and 14 (Part Two) of the article. These were originally published in June and December 2023 respectively.

Part 14: Unexpectedly to England! (2)

During the Great War our (great)grandfather Alfred Van Driessen was active at the front almost all the time until he was seriously injured and evacuated from the battlefield on March 7, 1918. Coincidentally, we were able to discover that after his first wound at the end of 1914, he stayed in for a while for rehabilitation in Chislehurst, a village in south-east London.

Chislehurst

Over the course of the First World War, Chislehurst grew into a center [sic] with ten Red Cross hospitals. Vacant villas and available Summer residences of wealthy Londoners were converted into 'VAD Red Cross Hospitals'. No fewer than 10,000 soldiers were cared for by volunteers from the 'Voluntary Aid Detachment - VAD'. Two thirds of these volunteers were (young) women.

The wounded soldiers arrived - often in the middle of the night - by train and were then first taken by horse and cart or by car to Christ Church Hall, a parish hall adjacent to the church building. There, a triage took place based on their injuries so that they could subsequently be transferred to other VAD hospitals in a more targeted manner. In Chislehurst many wealthy citizens lived in rich villas. They gave their drivers permission to transport the soldiers.

The local wealthy population provided loyal support by taking care of vehicles and donating food and drinks. Walks and garden parties were organized. The Belgian soldiers were very popular because of their gratitude. On January 1915 [sic] the residents of Chislehurst fraternized with the patients during a real concert at Holbrook House.



Chislehurst station at the end of 1914. From here the wounded soldiers were transported by 'automobiles' to hospitals in the area. (photo received from Joanna Friel)

In her book *My War Diary* (re-issue Ebury Press, 2014) Ethel Bilbrough describes anecdotally how Belgians sometimes returned 'tipsy' after their excursions. A disciplinary measure was introduced - of course not entirely to their liking: from now on all excursions would be accompanied by a female escort. Our grandfather started a local pub in Kemzeke after the war. He must have been there too... We let Ethel Bilbrough speak:

'We had all Belgians, none of them speak one word of English of course ... they were such nice refined men, not a bit vulgar or common. The Belgian patients in the hospitals were cared for and looked after! And concerts were got up for them constantly, and teas, and entertainments, and they were driven out in motors and carriages, and feted, and amused, and spoilt.'

In addition to wounded soldiers, many Belgian civilians also fled to England. They were also warmly received initially, but that enthusiasm diminished when it became clear that the war would last much longer than originally expected. The Belgians who attracted support were increasingly viewed as profiteers who went to work here and there and were thus viewed as competitors by job-seeking British.

Hornbrook House

Our grandfather Alfred Van Driessen arrived in Chislehurst on October 26 or 27, 1914. From Christ Church Hall he was transferred to Hornbrook Auxiliary Hospital, located in the wealthy villa Hornbrook House (pictured).





Postcard sent to Kemzeke by our grandfather, November 1914, with the handwritten text on the back: 'Dear parents – You should keep this card well, it is a beautiful memorial, I am sitting in the back of that car with my sako ...'

The house was built around 1875 as a boarding school for the wealthy class. About 40 'young gentlemen' stayed there. Charles Burges Fry, a famous English cricketer was a student there for many years. The school had a large garden with lawns, a vegetable garden and tennis courts.

Around 1900 the school was sold and the building came into the hands of the YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association), a youth organization that operated youth hostels with sports facilities. From October 16, 1914 to the end of August 1918, the building functioned as a VAD hospital. Afterwards the YMCA resumed its activities until the house was demolished in 1962 and replaced by a parking where the original name was retained: Hornbrook House Car Park.

Opening of the War Parliament

On November 12, 1914, there was a big crowd in London at the opening of the war parliament and the accompanying 'King's speech' by King George V. At that time, hundreds of wounded Belgian soldiers had already arrived in England for treatment.

They were treated and honored [sic] as heroes who had put up tough resistance against the advancing German army in difficult circumstances. King George V also wanted to pay tribute to them. That is why he decided that a delegation of Belgian soldiers could attend the royal procession. We read in the British press:

'By command of the King, special facilities were given to many of the wounded Belgians now in England. Motor vehicles containing Belgians from Chislehurst were permitted to take up positions around the memorial statue. A number of Belgian officers who were able to walk were accommodated on the pavement immediately outside the gates of the Palace courtyard, where they had an uninterrupted view of the Royal procession.'

Believe it or not, the choice fell on Chislehurst. Near Hornbrook House a line of cars was set up to take the delegation to London. And ... yes, our grandfather belonged to the group of Belgian soldiers that was able to attend the parade to 'The Opening of Parliament'! The large villa with several VAD nurses standing at the driveway is Hornbrook House. Our grandfather sits in the first car just behind the driver.

Our grandfather undoubtedly spent a wonderful time in England. But unfortunately the war was not over after his recovery. On March 26, 1915 he returned to the front in Belgium and he joined the 3th company of the 2nd battalion of the 4th regiment hunters on foot. The war would last until November 11, 1918.

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.

Part Three – The Second 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 Second World War, drawing out physical, economic and human aspects.

Rochester Bridge in Wartime – The Context

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 geared to the war effort. In addition, new industries were evident, with the important Shorts Aircraft factory at Rochester Airport, plus Shorts' famed facilities on the Medway for the manufacture and launching of flying boats from the Medway alongside Rochester Esplanade.

Rochester and the Bridge were therefore a key part of World War Two military planning, with the very real threat of a German invasion in 1940. To counter Operation Sealion, defensive planning with anti-invasion measures evolved at a furious pace, with the Medway Towns centred on Chatham (with its Dockyard) as a key nodal defence area within the network of *Stop Lines* straddling Kent and Southern England.¹

As well as its place in the preparations for the GHQ line and its defence by regular troops, Rochester saw interaction with the Royal Engineers and the Local Defence Volunteers (the Home Guard from 23 August 1940). There were some 24 general service battalions in Kent at this point. Whilst it is not known which battalion was responsible for Rochester in 1940, in 1944 the 13th Battalion, Home Guard under the command of Capt. H.S. Picking fulfilled this function. Like its counterparts elsewhere in Kent, it would have affiliated with its local regular army regiment, here the Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment.²

Physical Effect on Structures

As in World War One, the most obvious impact of the conflict was on the Bridge structure, and with the lasting effects of the Great War still fresh in the memory. With Nazi Germany's rise in the 1930s, there was a growing sense of tension. This was evident when the Munich Crisis manifested itself in a report to the Trust on 5 December 1938, whereby, at the request of the Town Clerk of Rochester, provisional permission had been given by the Bridge Clerk for Air Raid Precautions (ARP) to be undertaken and members of the public sheltered in cellars underneath Nos 1/3 Bridge Approach and the vaults underneath 4 and 6 High Street, Rochester, in premises owned by the Trust. ARP precautions were factored into a heightened sense of war preparations. At the Trust AGM on 1 June 1939, there was a discussion regarding the siting of an ARP post at the Trust-owned Great Delce Farm. This was to be part of a network of 15 such posts at strategic sites in Rochester under consideration.

The primary aim of the Trust has always been the preservation of the Bridge. The Bridge Engineer CL Howard Humphreys asked on 16 May 1939 whether the Trust:

‘... should consider whether any steps should be taken to secure continuity of traffic across the Medway should Rochester Bridge be damaged by enemy action ...’³

Concerns of an air attack in World War One morphed in the 1930s to potentially cataclysmic damage occurring from “the Bomber Always Getting Through” and evidenced by the Condor Legion's 1937 bombing of Guernica in the Spanish Civil War. Such fears influenced the Trust, responding to Ministry of Transport overtures, to consider potential mitigation in the event of serious damage to the Bridge through enemy action.

At the 1939 AGM, the Trust considered a confidential report for possible options proposed by the Ministry's Divisional Road Engineer:

- a pontoon bridge
- a ‘Callendar-Hamilton Unit Construction steel bridge’ over the **whole river** on the site of the former stone Medieval Bridge
- adaptation of the derelict LCDR Railway Bridge for road traffic

The Ministry-favoured option of a Callendar-Hamilton bridge of 170 feet (enough to cover the widest, central span of the Bridge and costing £10,000) was progressed by the Trust. To this end, clarification was sought from the Charity Commissioners for the Trust to use part of its Special Reserve Fund (£10,000) and Bridge Reserve Fund (£37,000) in funding. However, as Rochester Bridge was privately owned, the Treasury overruled the Ministry of Transport's intention to grant-fund up to 65%! The Charity Commissioners did not think it appropriate to allow the Trust to fund a temporary replacement (as the Objects of the Trust set its primary focus on *permanent* replacements) but gave leave to the Trust to seek High Court clarification. Given the considerable delay that this could import:

‘The (Bridge) Clerk suggested that...it might be possible to effect compromise on the following lines: -

- (a) the Ministry should purchase the material.
- (b) if the Bridge Wardens had need to use it, they should repay the cost.
- (c) if the Bridge Wardens didn't use it, they would promise (subject to consent of the Charity Commissioners) to make a contribution of not less than the prime cost of the material to any new Bridge over, or tunnel under, the Medway which should be built at the expense of the Ministry during the next few years.’⁴

When war was declared on 3 September 1939, Rochester Bridge once again faced the challenge of armed conflict. The militarisation of the Bridge saw distinct contrasts between the two World Wars, and whilst WWI Minute Books are quite detailed, the WWII *secret* anti-invasion measures were not formally recorded. However, isolated mentions within the WWII Trust Minute books facilitate a gradual picture:

- barbed wire
- a machine-gun post on Strood esplanade on the upstream (Cuxton) side
- concrete blocks on both the Strood and Rochester approaches

- materials storage and 'other emergency precautions'
- assistance from the Royal Engineers, Chatham in unloading, storage and advice on safety precautions 'at certain vulnerable points'
- liaison with the Ministry of Transport on the emergency bridge (reported at Court 4 Dec 1939 after Treasury approval) and removal of debris in the event of Bridge damage, so as not to interfere with river traffic
- construction of a concrete pillbox on the wharf (likely to have contained a light machine gun)
- installation of an AA Gun Post
- remaining detritus of war, including ballast associated with the AA Gun Post, slabs of concrete and coils of barbed wire⁵

The *Rochester Bridge Defence Scheme* held at the Royal Engineer's Museum archives provides a more precise picture, revealing the general lack of manpower and paucity of armaments available to the 190 Royal Engineers responsible for defending Rochester Bridge, stationed in 25 posts on the Rochester and Strood sides.⁶

S E C R E T.

ROCHESTER BRIDGE DEFENCE SCHEME.

APPENDIX "A".

Dispositions for manning with 490 R.E. Personnel.

SECTION NO.4.	STROOD SIDE OF RIVER.	No. Post on Plan.	No. of Men.	DESCRIPTION.	WEAPONS.	ROLE.	REMARKS.
2.	8			A.A. Lewis Gun.	8 Rifles	Engage low flying aircraft & cover River.	Quarters in adjacent building.
4.				Cancelled			Until arrival of Mortar.
25.	3			A/T. & M.G.	3 Rifles	Cover block	A/T rifle required. Quarters in Wingets.
38.	3 & R.A.			A/T. Gun Post (Secondary Role from Post 10)	1 6 Pdr.	Cover main Road	Quarters in Wingets.
26.	5.			Road Block.	5 Rifles. 2 Cases M.B.	To close Road Block 26 & form M.B. post in house adjacent.	do do
43.	4.			Rifle Post.	4 Rifles. 2 Cases M.B.	Cover Block 27 & close Block 32.	do do
44.				A/T. Gun.	R.A. Personnel.	Cover Block 26.	
TOTAL	23.						

Headquarters of Section at Winget's Office Building.

Rochester Bridge Defence System Appendix "A", Section 3, Strood side posts, troop/weapon deployment. Ref.: BMOC/1/2/3, Royal Engineers Museum.

These frenzied improvisations compared poorly to the Wehrmacht's Atlantic Wall's lavish armaments but reflected the reality of the almost total loss of heavy equipment (including 2,472 artillery pieces of all types) the British Expeditionary Force had suffered in France in 1940.

In addition to three six-pounder anti-tank guns, the Royal Engineers had a few Lewis light machine guns (of WWI vintage), and a few other more *exotic* armaments⁷ with the means to destroy installations, including the Bridge, by use of anti-tank mines.⁸

STORES - AMMUNITION - MINES & BOMBS.

Held by Quartermaster No.3. (L of C) Depot
Battalion, R.E., for ROCHESTER BRIDGE
DEFENCES.

	NO.	REMARKS.
Molotov Bombs	864 in 36 crates	
Self Igniting Phos. Bombs	192 in 8 "	
Hamilton Bombs	193	
Anti Tank Mines	336 in 42 "	
Detonators for Mines	336 in 4 "	
.303 Ball Ammun.	13,559 Rounds.	
.55 A/T Rifle Ammun.	200 Rounds.	
.303 Tracer Ammun.	1,939 Rounds.	
<u>WEAPONS.</u>		
Lewis Guns	4.	
Magazine Cases	40	
Anti Tank Rifles	2	
Magazines	16	

The following Transport is required for the manning of the Defences:-

Transport	No.	
2 Ton Lorry	1	
3 Ton Lorry	3	
Motor Cycles	6	
Car	1	

Rochester Bridge Defence System Appendix "C", Stores - ammunition, mines and bombs. Ref.: BMOC/1/2/3, Royal Engineers Museum.

S E C R E T.

APPENDIX "B".
(CONTINUED)

DISTRIBUTION OF A/TK MINES AT ROCHESTER BRIDGE DEFENCES.

(i)	Across railway tracks.....	100	mines.
(ii)	At Road junction.....	25	"
(iii)	Held ready near main road.....	34	"
(iv)	" " " " "	30	"
(v)	In wire entanglements behind roadblocks.....	40	"
(vi)	Behind roadblock.....	25	"
(vii)	At road in front of block.....	10	"
(viii)	At Esplanade.....	32	"
(ix)	Under Bridge.....	10	"
(x)	On Railway track.....	24	"
TOTAL		330	"

Rochester Bridge Defence System Appendix "B", Rochester Bridge Defences Anti-Tank Mines Distribution. Ref.: BMOC/1/2/3, Royal Engineers Museum.

The Bridge Chamber was partially militarised when the Bridge Clerk reported that the Senior Warden had given permission for the Clerk's room and telephone to be used as headquarters for the Officer-in-Command of troops during air-raid periods. As was a similar case in WWI, the Clerk was instructed to have the new stair carpet removed, the carpet on the landing rolled up, and to keep the Board Rooms locked!

It was indeed ironic that the Bridge was subject to more damage from its own side than that from enemy action! The considerable frustration of the Bridge Engineer is evident, when, on 21 November 1940, he reported that:

'We now turn to the damage which has been done to the Bridge by the Military Authorities. Early in July we were informed that some of the balustrading on the upstream side of the Strood approach, which we have since found to amount to 286 feet, had been removed to provide a clear field of fire for a gun ... sited on the Strood Esplanade. The balustrading had been removed very carefully by your maintenance contractor, Messrs. Wallis, who numbered and stacked sections of the balustrade so that they could be readily re-erected ...

Unfortunately, a junior officer (identity unknown) of the Royal Engineers, who apparently did not appreciate the reason why such care had been taken with the removal of the balustrade, came to the astonishing conclusion, that if broken into small pieces it would make good camouflage material for the gun post. Before he could be stopped, this officer had destroyed all but some 44 feet of the balusters, 32 sections of plinth and five lengths of capping.

‘... Eight lengths of the missing capping have been bedded in concrete on the Esplanade approach, presumably to form a tank trap, *although as the capping is of cast iron it is quite useless for this purpose.*’⁹

But that was not all! The Bridge Engineer further lamented that the military had seen fit to remove:

‘... corrugated iron sheets ... placed as protection over the steelwork stored for the repair of the cross-girders, bridge deck, etc., in case of damage, (had been used) in connection with a tunnel constructed as an ammunition store.’

As in so many other cases of wartime exigency, the situation was aptly summarised by the Bridge Engineer:

‘... the proper course will be to obtain the Army Authorities' acknowledgment of the claim in principle and their agreement that the amount of the claim shall remain in abeyance until it can be ascertained precisely, which can only be done when it is possible to obtain the new sections, whenever that may be.’

The speed at which anti-invasion measures were implemented and their often ad-hoc nature is consistent with the Junior Warden's report to the Court on 1 December 1941:

‘... the wire fencing erected by the Military on the Strood Approach, on the side facing Winget's works, was very flimsy and, in his opinion, dangerous. Ordered that the Bridge Clerk approach the Military Authorities with a view to the erection of a more substantial structure.’

The Bridge received additional wear and tear not only from increased traffic, but from the anti-invasion measures themselves, with the anti-tank concrete blocks in the centre of the road at the Strood and Rochester ends of the Bridge (others placed on the pavements at either end). It was reported on 21 November 1940 that the said centre blocks ‘caused too much obstruction to traffic’ and had been removed, leaving ‘an unsurfaced concrete patch of roadway at each end of the Bridge.’¹⁰

The closest that the Bridge came to physical damage from enemy action occurred on 12th February 1944, when, ‘... at 9.02 p.m. a large bomb exploded in the river opposite Gas House Point.’ Fortunately, although the road bridge vibrated ‘very considerably’, no apparent damage was done. Given concerns over the effects of this on the existing stresses on the Strood Abutment caused by the heavy LCDR railway bridge ramps (installed as the result of Ministry obsession, to mitigate potential failure of the then ONLY road bridge, and not removed until May 1946), the Bridge Engineer forwarded all available data to aid the National Physical Laboratory's ongoing monitoring.¹¹

During the war, anti-invasion measures hurriedly erected in 1940 were gradually removed, including barbed wire, and the machine gun emplacement; the companion ladders leading to the buttresses were also reinstated. The restoration of actual damage took longer. The Bridge Engineer reported on 14 November 1944 that five removed lamp standards had been located, but could not immediately be reinstalled, as Strood Rural District Council still needed two of them - as supports for air-raid sirens!¹² The small matter of the reinstatement of the Strood balustrades destroyed by the Royal Engineers was finally resolved on 2 December 1946 when the War Office settled the Trust's War Claim of £2,604 15s 1d.¹³

Economic Impacts of War

Unlike World War One, with the development of air power and its devastating use in conflicts in the 1930s (such as China and the Spanish Civil War), the prospect of widespread damage to structures was very real. Since its inception, the Trust has always owned property, from which it gets income to help maintain the Bridge. World War Two saw several instances of collateral damage to the Trust's property from bombing, including Nashenden, Upper Nashenden and Upper Delce Farms, likely due to their close proximity to Shorts' flying boat factory on Rochester Esplanade and its aircraft factory at Rochester Airport. The latter suffered a concentrated raid on 15 August 1940 by Dornier bombers of Kampfgeschwader 3, with heavy damage to the plant, and the destruction of nine Short Stirling bombers and aircraft parts worth £2million.¹⁴

The bombing of military targets early in WWII was notoriously inaccurate. Bomb damage often resulted from the indiscriminate dumping of bombs from air duels fought over Kent. More deliberate Luftwaffe bombing of targets in London and other urban conurbations resulted in heavy damage to the Trust-owned Riverside Paper Mills in Dartford in an air raid on 5 November 1940. The Trust subsequently made a War Claim to the War Department for £14,432 6s 11d.

The Personal Impact of War

Despite the physical devastation, there is no evidence of World War Two fatalities to members of the Trust from direct military action. However, some important associated individuals were affected, as follows.

Colonel Cecil Lee Howard Humphreys (1893-1941), the Bridge Engineer. Having served in WWI with the Honourable Artillery Corps, Humphreys returned to active military service in December 1939 as Commander of the 2nd Corps Signals. Bridge inspections thereafter were undertaken by his firm.¹⁵ Awarded the OBE after Dunkirk 'for distinguished services in the field' and appointed as Chief Signal Officer to the 3rd Corps, he was subsequently selected as Director of Works in the newly-formed Ministry of Works and Buildings. He served on this until his death on 18th July 1941, reported at the Court on 1 December 1941.

WWII Exemption from naval service of Bridge Caretaker, Leonard Cate. Cate was initially called up in September 1938 at the time of the Munich Crisis. His temporary exemption to naval service became 'indefinite' in June 1940 after the Ministry of Transport backed the Trust's application, citing Rochester Bridge as a 'vital national asset', but, even then, subject to manpower needs if necessary! The Trust recognised that Cate's exemption from military service as a Chief Shipwright had led to his Trust wages being substantially less than those from active service (18s a day), *and* accordingly agreed to pay him a War Bonus of £1 a week.

Could Rochester Bridge have been Blown Up?

Faced with a national emergency, and in particular following Dunkirk, the Ministry of Transport's stance aptly illustrated the Trust's powerlessness against the Military Authorities' emergency war powers. In response to a Trust question from Lord Darnley about Air Raid Precautions and the responsibility for conveying pedestrians across the river if the Bridge was damaged by enemy action, the reply was, 'If it is found necessary to blow up Rochester Bridge, this is the duty of the Military Authorities.'¹⁶

Endpiece

In 1940, Wingets on the Strood waterfront was the headquarters of Section 4 of the Royal Engineers defending the Bridge. Wingets played a vital role in preparation for the D-Day landings in France, through production of components and pumps for the two Mulberry Harbours taken across and assembled in Normandy in June 1944 to supply Allied invasion forces.

(b) AIR RAID PRECAUTIONS.

With reference to the question raised by Lord Darnley at the last June Court, the Clerk reported that the following letter had been received from the Ministry of Transport :—

“ The Divisional Road Engineer,
London Division,
Ministry of Transport,
Gaywood House,
Gt. Peter Street,
London, S.W.1.
8th June, 1940.

DEAR MR. BAKER,

ROCHESTER BRIDGE ON A.2.

I have your letter of June 6th and think that the information I am now sending you will explain the position to the Bridge Wardens.

1. If the bridge is seriously damaged by enemy action the temporary means of crossing the Medway will be by boat for pedestrians, who will have to rely on local enterprise. Vehicles will have to cross at Aylesford or Maidstone. The question of providing a temporary bridge, as contemplated for some of the London bridges, was considered in connection with Rochester Bridge, and the conclusion reached that no temporary bridge would be provided.
2. If it is found necessary to blow up Rochester Bridge, this is the duty of the Military Authorities.
3. If the Bridge Wardens still wish to have a Meeting, will you kindly let me know and I will make every endeavour to attend a conference.

Yours faithfully,

(Signed) E. B. HUGH-JONES,
for Divisional Road Engineer
(London).

P. T. BAKER, Esq.,
Rochester Bridge Trust.”

In view of this letter, the two Wardens did not consider it necessary to hold a conference.

Wardens' enquiry of Ministry of Transport and response; 8 June 1940. Minute Book 1930-1943, Rochester Bridge Trust.

Notes

1. Victor TC Smith, 'Kent's Twentieth Century Military and Civil Defences Part 2 – Medway', Kent Archaeological Society, 2017, and 'The Defence Of Kent Project (2008) for more information.
2. KR Gulvin, *Kent's Home Guard – A History*, (North Kent Books, 1980).
3. Rochester Bridge Trust (RBT) Minute Book 1930-1943, report by Bridge Engineer 16 May 1939.
4. RBT Minute Book 1930-1943, Annual General Meeting report by Bridge Clerk, 1 June 1939.
5. RBT Minute Book 1943-1953, Court meeting, 6 June 1946.
6. Rochester Bridge Defence Scheme Operations Scheme (Revised). Appendix “A” Sections 1-4 details manning, defence post locations and armaments available to defend the Bridge on the Rochester and Strood sides. Document ref: BMOC/1/2/3, ©Royal Engineers Museum.
7. Rochester Bridge Defence Scheme Operations Scheme, Appendix “C” Stores – Ammunition – Mines and Bombs. Document ref: BMOC/1/2/3, ©Royal Engineers Museum.

8. Rochester Bridge Defence Scheme Operations Scheme, Appendix “B”, Distribution of Anti-Tank Mines At Rochester Bridge Defences. Document ref: BMOC/1/2/3, ©Royal Engineers Museum.
9. RBT Minute Book 1930-1943, report by Bridge Engineer 21st November 1940 to Court meeting 2nd December 1940.
10. RBT Minute Book 1930-1943, report by Bridge Engineer 21st November 1940 to Court meeting 2nd December 1940.
11. RBT Minute Book 1943-1953, Court meeting 6 June 1944.
12. RBT Minute Book 1943-1953, report by Bridge Engineer 22 February 1944.
13. RBT Minute Book 1943-1953, Court meeting 2nd December 1946.
14. Philip MacDougall, *Short Brothers - The Rochester Years*, Fonthill, 2019.
15. RBT Minute Book 1930-1943, report by Bridge Engineer, 15 November 1939.
16. RBT Minute Book 1930-1943, Ministry of Transport response 8th June 1940, reported at Court meeting 2nd June 1940.

*Editor's Note

We do not know if the Roman crossing was the first or ‘original’. There is little information for the location of an earlier pre-Roman river crossing, however, there is no reason to presume there was not an earlier bridge in the vicinity.

Victorian Kitchen

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.

Janet reflects further on her time working in Medway's retail sector.

It was a good job I liked the kitchens in historic houses, because the staff room at The Young Man's Shop was just like one. It was like stepping back in time to another era when you went for a break. To access it a flight of steps led from the shop via the back door down into the depths, past the outside cold water tap, and back under the shop. This was THE cold tap that met all our watery needs, from filling the kettle to filling buckets for cleaning. There was a large range, a three-coned early gas fire, and a huge dresser with its secret door, and to me the best thing of all, a large window seat.

The kitchen table that we sat around was a Victorian pine one, complete with cutlery drawer. We used what we could of these ancient conveniences. The range was very handy for putting the gas ring on, and its plate rack was handy for drying shoes and other wet weather gear! The large, sturdy, very heavy kettle sat atop the gas ring. Its purpose was to service the tea pot and to take the chill off the buckets of water for cleaning. It was a pity that the range didn't work as it had a hot water tank attached to it. The three-coned gas fire was like a remnant from the thirties. We made toast on the gas fire by propping the bread up against it. The fire was meant to keep us warm, the toast merely a byproduct, but we were accused of using it to make toast and thus increasing the shop gas bill. We protested our innocence. We only made toast when trying to keep ourselves warm by the miserable heat from the ancient gas fire. Washing up was done using a plastic bowl on top of the dresser with washing soda. Large bars of green soap were employed for cleaning the apron of the shop and the shop floor. The huge dresser would not have looked out of place in Knole's* kitchen. We used its deep drawers to house tea cloths and clean dusters. There was a small door into the back of this dresser, just inside the entrance to the kitchen, which was intriguing. We didn't venture far in our exploration, but all we could see were the back boards of the dresser. Whether this was part of an old pantry or not we didn't know. The passage behind the dresser led to what had become the cellar, where old shop fittings went to die, along with Christmas decorations from previous years. It could have been where the shop ghost lived - the one that wrote in the dust of an old cheval mirror that I found in the cellar!

*The mid-15th century Knole House near Sevenoaks

News and Events

Calendar of Forthcoming Events and Exhibitions

FOMA Talks and Events



Friday 22 November, 7.30 pm

Medieval Christmas

A talk by Toni Mount

In the Middle Ages, Christmas was celebrated with as much enthusiasm as it is now, perhaps more so, as the belief in God and the birth of Christ were very real to everyone. But how do you celebrate without turkey, roast potatoes, or Christmas crackers and what about Santa? We would, however, recognise many aspects of a medieval Christmas - Christmas carols and the Christmas feast, the invention of mince pies and even the first pantomime dame. Toni Mount will explore the origins and traditions of the Medieval Christmas in this entertaining, illustrated talk.

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

Medway Archives Centre

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

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 26 November, 2pm to 3.30pm

Hairdressers, barbers and getting a hair cut

Lecture Series

We are just finalising our speakers and dates for the MAC Spring Lecture Series 2025. Keep an eye out for our publicity about these popular talks and remember to book your tickets early to avoid disappointment.



Christmas Event

Wednesday, 4 December, 10am to 12noon

Join us for our annual friendly social
with a small sale of old and new books and enjoy some seasonal refreshments.

There will be a free 30-minute talk from 11am about
nineteenth century entertainers who visited Medway.

MAC Newsletter

The best way to hear about our forthcoming events and outreach is to sign up for our newsletter. Go to www.medway.gov.uk and click on 'Sign up for email notifications.' Select 'archives' and you'll receive a regular email keeping you up-to-date with our events programme and news.

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.

Collections Care Closure

Please note the Medway Archives Centre will be closed from Monday, 23 December 2024 to Saturday 11 January 2025, re-opening on Monday, 13 January 2025.

This temporary closure enables us to work on tasks that cannot take place whilst we are open to the public, and we look forward to telling you what we've been up to in the next *Clock Tower*!

How to Make an Appointment

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

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

FRIENDS OF CHATHAM TRACTION

Our latest Update is available here:

https://www.chathamtraction.org.uk/updates/240731_Update_65.pdf

We are now really getting somewhere, as putting the bus back into its original environment to serve community purposes has driven the project from the outset. This is not to exclude the enthusiast side of things, however, and a driveable bus gets ever closer. Our inclusion in the Heritage Places initiative for Medway will, we hope, open many doors and facilitate co-operation with other organisations. A sharing of resources could be especially useful for such input as publicity, admin and recruitment.

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

Friends of Broomhill

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



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

Medway Geographical and Local History Society

Friday November 22: *Around the Bay of Biscay*, a talk by Martin Harris.

Friday January 24 2025: *Islands of the Medway Estuary*, a talk by Adam Taylor.

Friday February 28: *Pyramids and Pharaohs*, a talk by Elizabeth Mooney.

Friday March 28: *The Trinity House Story*, a talk by Peter Kean.

Friday April 25: *Know your Way, an Atlas of Roadway and Pathway Types*, a talk by Alan Mills.

Friday May 23: AGM/History talk.

Meetings are held at Holy Trinity Church Hall, Twydall Lane, Gillingham Kent ME8 6TN.

Meeting time 2.00/3.30pm. Annual Subscription £20. Visitors £4. ALL are welcome.

For further information contact Ring Vanda Woollett 01634 389916 / Lorna Bailey 01634 572139.

Follow us on Facebook.

About The Clock Tower

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

Editorial deadlines

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

The copy deadline for Issue 77 of *The Clock Tower* is Monday 27 January 2025, with publication on Wednesday 19 February 2025.

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

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

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

Further Information

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

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

Membership enquiries should be directed to the FOMA Chairman, as above.

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

Dr Christopher de Coulon Berthoud

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

Membership Secretary

Vacant

Webmaster

Dr Alexander Thomas

info@foma-lsc.org

Members

Natasha Boardman-Steer

natasha@creatabot.co.uk

Len Feist:

lfstrood@yahoo.co.uk

Cindy O'Halloran

cindy_ohalloran@hotmail.com

Vanessa Sanderson

vanessa.sand12@gmail.com

The Clock Tower Editor and Publicist

Amanda Thomas

editor@foma-lsc.org

The Driver Fountain returns to Luton on its 125th Anniversary

On 26 October 2024 at 2pm, Kate Mechedou (pictured with the red scarf below) of the Arches Local group welcomed everyone to the unveiling of the Driver fountain at the Luton Arches in Chatham. After a speech by the group's Elizabeth Esposito, the fountain was unveiled by local children. A huge crowd were in attendance, including local MP Tristan Osborne and members of the Driver family. Following the ceremony, a celebratory lunch was held at Gurkha Fire restaurant, New Cut, Chatham. For more, read Arches Local's article on page 20.



Medway Archives Centre Christmas Event

Wednesday, 4 December, 10am to 12noon

Join us for our annual friendly social!

Book sale of old and new books and seasonal refreshments

**From 11am, a free 30-minute talk on nineteenth century entertainers
who visited Medway.**

The Live Bait Squadron Society marks the 110th Anniversary of the Sinking of the Cruisers



In September, the Historic Dockyard Chatham hosted an extraordinary event to commemorate the 110th anniversary of the sinking of the three World War One cruisers, HMS *Aboukir*, *Hogue* and *Cressy*. At the end of the evening, Chairman (and FOMA Life Member) Henk van der Linden handed the reins of the Live Bait Squadron Society over to Stuart Heaver; Henk remains as Chairman Emeritus. Read more on page 15.



Photograph by Amanda Thomas.