

Chatham Police Court Records

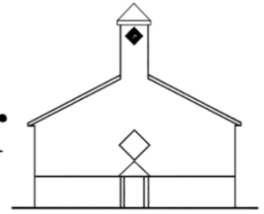
On page 21, MAC volunteer, Pauline Weeds reveals some of the extraordinary stories discovered in the Chatham Police Records held at the Medway Archives Centre. In the 1870s, being drunk and disorderly on the streets was the cause of many arrests and The Brook in Chatham was an area notorious for prostitutes!



*The Brook, Chatham, 1880, from a watercolour by E A Phipson 1880.
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If undelivered, please return to:
Medway Archives Centre, 32 Bryant Road, Strood, Rochester, ME2 3EP.

The Clock Tower



Issue Number 77: February 2025
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The Friends of Medway Archives
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The Conquering of Kent



2025 marks the 1,200th anniversary of the Battle of Ellendun (AD825) when the Kingdom of Kent was conquered by Wessex. Inside, Dr Alexander Thomas explains the historical significance of this stepping stone in British history and how Medway was to become a frontier zone (see page 13). Photograph: AI Generated / Bing Image Creator

ALSO INSIDE

Part One of Deborah Collins' story of the British-born wives of enemy aliens in World War One Medway; see page 16.

AND

Pauline Weeds and what MAC volunteers have discovered in the Chatham Police Records; see page 21.

The Medway Archives Christmas Event

The annual Medway Archives Christmas event took place on 4 December and a highlight of the morning was MAC's Manager, Helen Worthy's presentation (pictured below) on William Pinn Senior and Junior and their *commonplace* book. This fascinating early nineteenth century scrapbook was also on display. For more, see Amanda Thomas' report on page 10.



Photographs: Dr Alexander Thomas.

Aliens and the Strood Union Workhouse

Lorne Villa later housed Strood Library, but during the First World War it was a so-called Scattered Home. On page 16, Deborah Collins begins a three-part serial on what happened to the British-born wives of aliens and their children during this period. Lorne Villa was, of course, situated on the site of the present Medway Archives Centre.



Lorne Villa, 32 Bryant Road, Strood. Undated image (perhaps c. 1963), probable © Chatham News. Donated to MAC by the family of the late Vernon Stratford, Deputy Picture Editor of the Chatham News and Standard.

Medway Archives Centre Report

What happens at the Medway Archives Centre when the doors close in January for Collection Care and the cleaning begins? Helen Worthy reveals all on page 10!

Right: the reorganisation and deep clean of the searchroom



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Chairman's Letter

Elaine Gardner



Hello and welcome to 2025, though I hope the dismal weather has improved by the time you read this!

I am looking forward to the series of talks at Medway Archives which will have begun by the time this reaches you but they continue each month until July. I know there is now very limited availability and some talks have sold out, but you might still be able to purchase a ticket; more details are on page 42.

We are delighted that on March 14, Stuart Bligh will be coming to give a talk for FOMA. Stuart will be talking about William Harrison, a clipper ship captain and the ship's (sadly) last journey from Australia. I heard a shortened version of the talk at October's Medway History Day, and I must say I am very much looking forward to hearing the fuller version. I can recommend it, and details for booking are on page 39. Another note for your diary is the FOMA AGM on 11 April (see page 5), and we hope to see as many members as possible there and at the talk in March.

Unfortunately, I have been sitting at home since December with my leg in a boot – and have been moving around on crutches – and (with more time than usual to think about things), it occurred to me that the AGM will mark the start of FOMA's 20th year. The Friends was started at a meeting in April 2006 which outlined the reasons for establishing it, namely to support the Archives and find ways of raising funds to help them, so I joined. I was co-opted onto the committee in 2007 when the Heritage Lottery bid was being put together. Stephen Dixon, the archivist, wanted a teacher on the team for the educational aspects, and I formally joined the committee at the 2008 AGM. I then took over the chair in 2017, seven years ago. I have thoroughly enjoyed the role, but to survive I think committees and committee roles need to evolve, so for that reason I am proposing to stand down as Chairman at the AGM. We have had some younger members join the committee in the past couple of years who are bringing new ideas and outlooks, so please come along and volunteer, as we would love more of you to bring fresh ideas to the committee. We are a very friendly bunch!

What is lovely to see is that of the members who joined in April 2006, 16 members and societies are *still* members, which is fantastic. So, a big thank you for your continued support for FOMA and for MAC. With a fully staffed team at the Archives and volunteer support, we are all going from strength to strength!

Heritage Asset Register

You will recall that in the November 2023 (*The Clock Tower*, Issue 72), we published the news that the previous month (on 8 October), the formal announcement was made by the National Heritage Lottery Fund (NLHF) regarding the launch of a new project called Heritage Places:

We're forging long-term partnerships with towns and cities across the UK as part of a 10-year journey to help places thrive by unlocking the potential of their heritage. ... We're committing £200m to help areas across the UK thrive. By 2033, 20 long-term projects will be transforming towns, cities and landscapes using a dedicated funding pot of £200m. The first nine places are: Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon, County Durham, Glasgow, Leicester, Medway, Neath Port Talbot, North-East Lincolnshire, Stoke-on-Trent, and Torbay. ... The launch of Heritage Places is another step in the delivery of our Heritage 2033 strategy, launched in March 2023. This strategic initiative is part of our long-term vision for heritage to be valued, cared for and sustained for everyone, now and in the future.



Since that announcement, FOMA has become involved to a greater or lesser degree with local projects that might benefit from the funding, such as the Dickens Chalet Restoration Project, and the campaign for a statue of Isaac Newell. However, we now hope we might benefit more directly. Some of you will have seen on our Facebook Page the announcement by FOMA Vice Chairman Rob Flood (pictured):

‘Medway is one of nine places that will benefit from £200 million pounds of investment from the National Heritage Lottery Fund ‘Heritage Places Initiative’. The Initiative is a long-term partnership with towns and cities across the UK as part of a 10-year journey to help places thrive by unlocking the potential of their heritage. This is designed to respond to local need and opportunity, support places to use heritage to build pride in place, inspire local communities and power regeneration.

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 78 of *The Clock Tower* is Monday 28 April 2025, with publication on Wednesday 21 May 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

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Front Cover Accreditations and Website Information

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

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

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

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

Further Information

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

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

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

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 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.

With this in mind, Medway Council is keen to build up a picture of the heritage assets and the sector in Medway – to understand the opportunities and the challenges and learn what is needed for the future.’

Rob gave a link to the online form for registering local heritage assets, and of course, in the process, he also registered FOMA.

New Members

A warm welcome to new FOMA members Ella Woolley, Ian Petrie, Laura Fisher, and Steven Keevil.

The Friends of Medway Archives

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Friday, 11 April 2025, 7.00 for 7.30 pm;

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

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

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

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

Subscription Renewal Reminder

FOMA Membership subscriptions are due for renewal from 1 January 2025.

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

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

Rates are now as follows:

Single Membership £12 - Family Membership £14 - Life Membership £120

Society Membership £18 - Corporate Membership £60.

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

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

These details can also be used to renew by BACS payment.
PLEASE ADD YOUR NAME IN THE REFERENCE BOX.

Thank you!

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 £2.80 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

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



Our latest Update is available here:

https://files.chathamtraction.org.uk/updates/241207_Update_66.pdf

Our 2025 Annual General Meeting is planned for Saturday 1st March, to be held at the Huguenot Museum in Rochester.

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!

£4 for a single lecture. Advance booking is essential (see below).
Email archives@medway.gov.uk * telephone 01634 332 714 * drop in and purchase at the Medway Archives Centre.

PLEASE NOTE

At the time of going to press, all the remaining lectures - apart from the final July fixture (*A Meander along Rochester High Street*) - were already fully booked. In order to avoid disappointment, admission is by prior booking only. There are often cancellations and so please email or call us if you would like to check availability, or wish to be placed on the reserve list.

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.

How to Make an Appointment

Email us at malsc@medway.gov.uk to make an appointment and to discuss which items you wish to consult.

For original archive material you must give at least three working days' notice of your intention to visit. For all other material (such as books, maps, photographs) we just require one working day's notice. When you book we will ask for your name and contact details so that we can keep in touch with you about your appointment.

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

We were pleased to welcome Amino Ake to our team of MAC volunteers. She joins Pauline Weeds and Olivia Read in indexing our fascinating collection of court registers. This index is not currently publicly available so do get in touch if you'd like us to search it for you.

We have hosted a work experience student. This enables those wondering about a career in archives management to experience the day-to-day running of an archive centre and learn about the different job roles at MAC. Sometimes our volunteers, too, are hoping to eventually work in the archive sector, and these opportunities help to develop the archive professionals of the future.

KMTV visited MAC to see our resources and interview Sue Haydock about Will Adams. The *Kent Tonight Special* is still available to view online and follows the historic journey of Will Adams from Gillingham to Shogun of Japan.

As you can see on pages 2 and 10, our Christmas drop-in proved popular, and we all enjoyed this social event. As well as a chance to buy new and pre-loved books on Medway's history, there was also a free talk and seasonal refreshments.

Visitors to our search-room will spot two new microfilm readers. These modern scanners are linked to our printer. The advantages of the new scanners include improved image definition and cheaper printing costs. Please note that the old reader/printer machine will soon be removed, so do ask staff for a brief session to show you how to use these new machines.

Our outreach events continue. We were delighted to be invited to the 125th birthday celebrations at the Gordon Road Academy in Strood. To mark the occasion, the Medway Mayor and Mayoress unveiled a series of mosaics, and we had tables in the temporary Gordon Museum. The historic maps we took along proved extremely popular, and we were able to chat about the history of the area and the services we offer here at MAC.

Each year we have a period when we are closed for Collections Care. This year we concentrated on a thorough deep clean and reorganisation of the search-room. As well as the above-mentioned new microfilm scanners, you will notice that we have more table space and resources for customers – see the inside back page. For the first time since we moved to the Bryant Road site, you can browse our collection of telephone and business directories, an important resource for family and business historians researching the period after the last *Kelly's Directory* in 1974.

The deep clean of the strongroom enables us to check for damp, mould, pests or dirt. These all pose a threat to our resources, many of which are unique and irreplaceable. This cleaning process ensures the preservation of our collections for future generations. Collections Care closure also gave us the opportunity to re-package an archive collection. Keeping our collections stored in archival quality folders and boxes is an important part of ensuring the long-term survival of historic documents.

Staff training continues. We are all trained in first aid, fire safety and health and safety, all of which help to keep our staff and customers safe. But did you know that staff receive training in many other topics such as IT, data protection, diversity and equality, and disability discrimination? In addition, MAC staff receive specialist training in emergency planning, palaeography, research skills and digital preservation skills, as well as attending online seminars and lectures from our archive and heritage partners. In this way we can ensure our skills are up-to-date as well as increasing our knowledge of history and other archive collections.

Events

By the time you read this report, we will have had our first Saturday drop-in session of 2025. If you missed *Jezreel's Tower* on Saturday 1 February, don't worry, just

7 May 2025

Borstal - From Building Forts to Building up Young Men
Ralph Allison.

(FULLY BOOKED)

Ralph Allison looks at the history of a prison that has had many different roles, from housing labourers who built defensive fortifications, to starting a self-titled system of youth justice which spread across the country and around the world.

4 June 2025

The Explosive Works at Cliffe - Cordite, nitroglycerine and the 'Flying Archaeologist'
Amanda Thomas.

(FULLY BOOKED)

Notorious for its many fatal and grisly accidents, the factory employed a great number of local women during World War One, including Amanda's grandmother. In 2013, English Heritage published an archaeological survey and analysis of the remains of the Curtis and Harvey works, to which Amanda and her mother Dulcie contributed. Later that year, Amanda appeared on *BBC 4's Flying Archaeologist*, to talk about her family's involvement with the production of explosives at Cliffe.

2 July 2025.

A Meander along Rochester High Street (part 2)
Geoff Ettridge.

For over 10 years, Geoff Ettridge has used tours and rambles to tell something of our past and to raise money for good causes. In this talk Geoff draws from his various tours to make connections with places along the High Street, and our local and national past. Geoff gave the first part of this popular talk in 2024. Join him for part two as he continues his meander along Rochester High Street.

Medway Archives Centre

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

If you missed *Jezreel's Tower* on Saturday 1 February, don't worry, just make an appointment and staff will be happy to show you some of our resources on this fascinating part of Medway's history.

Drop-in Sessions

Saturday 1 March 10am-midday: *Trams and Tramways*

Saturday 5 April 10am-midday: *Medway on Canvas*

Saturday 3 May 10am-midday: *Paddle steamers*

These sessions are free and there's no need to book, just drop in.

The display in the foyer by our colleagues in Medway Council's Sports Team. *Medway's Sporting Heroes: Past Present & Future* will be in our foyer until Saturday, 12 April. This is available to view during our normal opening hours.

The MAC Spring Lecture Series 2025

2 April 2025

The Medway Forts
Keith Gulvin.

(FULLY BOOKED)

Keith Gulvin explores the reasons for fortifying the Thames and Medway estuaries. Keith also looks at the various phases of construction and scientific advances, and considers what remains of the forts today.

make an appointment and staff will be happy to show you some of our resources on this fascinating part of Medway's history.

Our drop-in sessions continue:

Saturday 1 March 10am-midday: *Trams and Tramways*

Saturday 5 April 10am-midday: *Medway on Canvas*

Saturday 3 May 10am-midday: *Paddle steamers*

These sessions are free and there's no need to book, just drop in. For more details, see page 40.

We are pleased to be hosting a display by our colleagues in Medway Council's Sports Team. *Medway's Sporting Heroes: Past Present & Future* will be in our foyer until Saturday, 12 April. This is available to view during our normal opening hours.

Our MAC Lecture Series began on Wednesday, 5 February, and details can be found on pages 40-42. Please be aware that by the time you read this, most of the lectures will be already fully booked, and admission is by prior booking only. However, there are often cancellations and so please email or call us if you would like to check availability for one of these events, or wish to be placed on the reserve list.

Donations

All donations to our collections undergo a period of quarantine. This enables Sarah Trim-West, our Archivist, and Emma Ovenden, our Librarian, to identify items requiring future conservation work, as well as ensuring donations showing signs of mould, dirt or insect infestation are treated before being added to the main collections. We look forward to telling you more about new additions to our collections in the next issue of *The Clock Tower*!

This report 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.

The Medway Archives Christmas Event

Amanda Thomas



The annual Medway Archives Christmas event took place on 4 December. It was wonderful to see the centre full of people chatting, eating mince pies and enjoying the display of archival material – not to mention the always hugely anticipated annual book sale.

A highlight of the morning was MAC's Manager, Helen Worthy's presentation on William Pinn Senior and Junior and their extraordinary *commonplace* book. It was also fantastic to be able to see it on display after the talk had concluded. This commonplace book might be better described as a scrapbook and it was put together from about 1800 to 1830 by the Pinns. However, most of the theatre bills, tickets, posters, flyers, letters, poems, and newspaper articles pasted into it date to around 1815 and 1816.

A tailor in Chatham, William Pinn Senior lived in Globe Lane and had started his career as a Royal Marine; he was also the licensee of the Horn Tavern in Chatham High Street. In 1815 he started the Pinndarian Society, as Helen explained, which was established 'for blending improvement with amusement'. Helen pointed out that the name of the society played on the similarity between the name of Pindar, the ancient Greek poet, and Pinn himself who, in 1800, had published a book of poetry. The classical allusions did not cease there as Helen showed us an allegorical image from the scrapbook which showed Pinn as a Fawn surrounded by interesting images. In the audience was FOMA Webmaster, Dr Alexander Thomas and he recognised one of the images which had hitherto seemed somewhat mysterious. He realised it bore a striking similarity to the so-called Magic Mirror which had once belonged to Queen Elizabeth I's *scientific advisor*, John Dee, and which is now kept at the British Museum (see [magical mirror; mirror-case | British Museum](#)). Made of polished obsidian, or volcanic glass, Dee called it his spirit mirror and thought he could use it to communicate with ghosts.

News and Events

Calendar of Forthcoming Events and Exhibitions

FOMA Talks and Events

Friday 14th March, 2025, 7.30pm

William Harrison: The Clipper Ship Captain

A talk by Stuart Bligh

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

This is the story of William Harrison who was born in a village in Kent in 1833 and who went to sea aged 17 and became a master mariner aged 27. The talk covers the research done to uncover William's incredible but tragic story, including his early life, his family and his career and voyages at sea. In doing so, the talk highlights the many different ways in which anyone interested can unearth similar stories using archives and records, including those available online.

Stuart Bligh is a former County Archivist for Kent, and Head of Research and Information at the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich. He currently co-ordinates the Maritime Kent Special Interest Group for the Kent Archaeological Society.

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.

Ghost, we would like toast in the morning at tea break, me, Rose and her friend Len, the window cleaner, so don't mess with the gas fire in the kitchen, otherwise we will be blamed again for using too much fuel. I am sure it's you who gets behind the dresser and rattles the plates. That door on the side is just your size. Make sure the door to the shop window remains shut. I do not want to pass by later and have to lock it properly and put the key through the shop door again, like I did last week. And, *please* don't topple the mannequins in the main window when we are trying to redress them. As for the price tickets, which somehow become muddled just when I need to use them, you know me and maths don't make good bedfellows.

One more thing Ghost ... wait for me!



Cover of the magazine, Ghost Stories, May 1927, Vol. 2, No. 5; Constructive Publishing; Wikimedia Commons.

It had long been thought that the mirror had been made in Europe, but recent analysis has shown that the obsidian comes from Pachuca in Mexico, and the mirror was crafted by the Aztecs. Following Helen's talk there was much discussion about the mirror and absolutely everyone wanted to see the original page in the scrapbook!

The book also contains items which reveal the extraordinary range of entertainment available to the residents of the Medway Towns in the early nineteenth century, and needless to say, the famous John Baker is featured. Helen had previously written about the *Rochester Pedestrian* in Issue 55 of *The Clock Tower* (August 2019):

In 1815, in the field behind the Cossack public house in Delce Lane, Rochester, John Baker attempted to walk 1,000 miles in 21 days. This feat gripped the nation, and was reported in great detail in the national and Kentish newspapers ...

The scrapbook also included the Donkey Match, the 'once celebrated Jack Hammond of Troy Town' (nothing further known!), and the male elephant which was put on show behind the Star Inn on Star Hill, Rochester - not to be confused with the one at Strood Fair, as the Star Hill specimen was three times the size!

Indeed, in the scrapbook there is also a ticket for Strood Fair and a cutting about it from the *Kentish Gazette* (1 September 1815) which describes 'its usual attractions of beasts, birds, shows and buffoons'.

Helen explained that in the early 1800s there was quite a craze for *anti-combustible* men- or women-salamanders, mimicking the amphibian of the same name which was believed could withstand fire. She continued that, "According to the *Kentish Gazette* Monsieur du Pain was a travelling entertainer who performed in Dover in November 1814. 1,000 guineas were offered to anyone who could discover 'art or deception' in his act! And by 1818 he was in Ipswich, claiming to have returned from the continent having performed to Napoleon Bonaparte and King Louis XVIII." Other *non-combustible* entertainers included the exotic sounding Madame Girardelli and Signor Boeze. Helen concluded, "Later, the escapologist Houdini wrote a book explaining the methods used by these performers, claiming it was all trickery but in 2009 the tv programme *MythBusters* demonstrated that a person can wet their hand and briefly dip it into molten lead without injury, and this is a scientific effect called the Leidenfrost effect." Not something to try at home, Helen added!

Helen's talk was absolutely fascinating and immensely entertaining. She concluded with a slide of a theatre performance at Upnor. There has never been a theatre at Upnor but these performances took place in a temporary structure, "erected for two nights opposite the Jolly Sailor Pub – later the Pier Hotel." The slide showed an address on the Battle of Waterloo, but Helen wanted to talk about a play which told the tragic story of George Barnwell, a tale by George Lillo which was already some 80 years old by the beginning of the nineteenth century. Helen explained, "we do know that Charles Dickens was aware of the play and probably saw it as a child, as it seems to have completely disappeared from the stage by 1820. It's likely, then, that he saw it in Medway somewhere, perhaps at the Rochester Theatre or, just as likely, a performance by a travelling theatre troupe such as this one! It made such an impression on the young Dickens that this play is satirized in *Great Expectations*."

The MAC Christmas event continued for some time after Helen's wonderful talk. More tea was drunk and more mince pies were eaten, and it was certainly one of the best pre-Christmas get-togethers the archive has ever hosted.



The Ghost of Ceattas House

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 – with a haunting story for a cold, winter's night!

Hello Ghost. Do you still haunt my shop? I call it *my* shop as I think I am the only one left out of the four of us who lived out our lives there. Ghost, it was Ruby who first felt your presence, moving from under the stairs through into the showroom, passing me sitting near the fire. Ghost, you came at five most nights, long after my friend Rose had gone home, after her cleaning work was done, leaving the three of us, the manager, Ruby and me, waiting for the last-minute customer who usually came just as we wanted to go home.

As I was Junior Sales I was allowed home. The manager was First Sales and dealt first with the customers followed by Ruby. I was last and not needed most of the time. I hope you have been keeping the stock clean and tidy, Ghost, and haven't forgotten the blazers in the showroom. I nearly lost my job for that small oversight. And please don't muddle up the socks again, it takes me ages to sort them out. We don't want a repeat of the trick you played on Ruby, when she ended up sitting in a cardboard box, laughing fit to bust. Please do not interfere with Rose's ancient Hoover. It puffs out enough dust as it is every time it starts up. Leave the speaking tube alone as well, Ghost. The last time you made your presence felt, the manager went puce trying to attract the attention of the accountant upstairs by blowing up it.



The Chatham Naval Memorial, taken in 2015; Youfoundmeout, Wikimedia Commons.

1200 Years Later: Medway, Kent and the Battle of Ellendun

Dr Alexander Thomas



Dr Alexander Thomas is an independent archaeological and historical researcher of Viking Age England and FOMA's Webmaster. His first book – The Danelaw in Viking Age England: The Distribution, Impact, and Duration of Danish Law – reappraising the Danelaw, is due to be published by Amsterdam University Press later this year. He holds a PhD in Archaeology and Anthropology from the University of Bristol and is member of the Offa's Dyke Collaboratory and Loyalty in the Medieval World Research Networks, and the Rochester Cathedral Research Guild.

2025 marks the 1200th anniversary of one of the most historically consequential and significant battles that shaped the story of Medway, Kent, and, more broadly, the unification of England. The Battle of Ellendun in AD825 was a pivotal victory for the Kingdom of Wessex over the Kingdom of Mercia. Wessex was led by King Egbert (r. AD 802–839), who was Alfred the Great's grandfather, while Mercia was led by King Beornwulf (r. 823–826).



The Battle of Ellendun, AD825 imagined by AI; AI Generated / Bing Image Creator

Wessex and Mercia were two of the English kingdoms that formed what is known as the Heptarchy—the seven Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. The other kingdoms included Kent, Sussex, Essex, East Anglia, and Northumbria. Between around AD590 and AD825, the kingdoms of Kent, Northumbria, and Mercia each had their time in the limelight for their achievements in religion, education, and warfare. The result of Ellendun marked the beginning of the end for the Heptarchy, as *The Winchester Chronicle* records:

‘And the same year King Egbert and King Beornwulf fought at Ellendun, and Egbert took the victory; and a great slaughter was made there. Then he sent his son Æthelwulf from the army, and Ealhstan, his bishop, and Wulfheard, his ealdorman, to Kent with a great troop, and they drove Baldred the king north over the Thames...’ (Swanton 1996: 60)

Although the Battle of Ellendun took place somewhere in Wiltshire, the Kingdom of Kent, along with Essex and Sussex, was conquered by Wessex in the aftermath due to its victory and newfound power. Kent, Essex, and Sussex became known as Wessex’s Southern Kingdoms and were held by the heir to the throne or *ætheling*. Æthelwulf, Alfred the Great’s father, was the first heir to hold this territory on behalf of his father, Ecgbert. Alfred the Great (r. AD871 – AD899) and, Alfred’s son, Edward the Elder (r. AD899 – AD924) also held these lands when they became heirs.

AD793 traditionally marks the start of the Viking Age in England following the sacking of the monastery of Lindisfarne on Holy Island in Northumbria. The sacking of Lindisfarne was the beginning of an 85-year period of intermittent raids and warfare between the English and bands of raiding and plundering Danish pirates. It was the treaties of Wedmore (AD878) and of Alfred and Guthrum (c. AD884 – AD890) which would eventually bring this so-called *Viking Invasion Period* to an end. The *Treaty of Alfred and Guthrum* created the area of northeast England known as the Danelaw. The Danelaw was a socially constructed area where Danish law happened to be enforced sporadically alongside English law. The problem for Wessex and for Alfred was where the Danelaw’s western bounds had been agreed. The boundary cut the southern kingdom—a Wessex possession—of Essex off from the others of Kent and Sussex. Indeed, it remains a subject of historical debate about whether Alfred the Great gave Essex away to the Vikings in the AD880s. The evidence seems to suggest the situation was nuanced and that although Alfred put Essex on the Danish side, it did not follow Danish law or adopt Scandinavian culture. Moreover, the creation of the Danelaw meant Medway became a frontier area.

On 15th October 1952, His Royal Highness The Duke of Edinburgh unveiled 50 bronze tablets here at the Chatham Naval Memorial, showing the names of men and women of the Royal Navy, Merchant Navy and others who lost their lives in the Second World War and have no known graves. My mother, sister, brother and I, along with other families were invited to attend the ceremony as my father’s name appears on one of those plaques. I was 12 years old at the time.”

Rita said to me that the only time she had to stand outside Miss Sackett, the Headmistress’ room at Fort Pitt school was when she had had to ask permission for a day off to attend this ceremony. She concluded:

“This memorial has played a very important part in my life and I attend the Remembrance Day Service here every year, together with my son and daughter-in-law. It felt such an honour to be asked to do this [in 2024].”

The event was covered by the local *Medway Messenger* newspaper.

The Chatham Naval Memorial is a memorial not only to those brave men and women who gave their lives, but also to the families left behind.

Editor’s Note

*From the Commonwealth War Graves Commission’s website, describing World War Two commemorative events in June 2024:

‘Our Torch of Commemoration travelled from the UK to Normandy to mark D-Day’s 80th anniversary. As we approached D-Day, we launched a programme of events to reach people across the UK, Italy and in France. These momentous events aimed to build connections between veterans and young people, and bring people together to pass the Torch of Commemoration to the next generation. Events took place at locations across the UK before crossing to Normandy for 6th June D-Day 80 anniversary.’

During his talk, Tony brought to our attention the names of the holders of the Victoria Cross, plus a 15-year-old Royal Marine bugler, and the sad tale of twin brothers who lived and died together. Other members of the group also had stories to tell, which Tony was interested to hear, and he gave us his contact details as well, so that he might enrich his collection of individuals. I too sent him *my* story, which was more my grandmother's story, and which I repeat here.

My grandmother, Queenie married George in 1912; they had three children between them. In 1915 George joined the Royal Navy and was sadly killed on active service in 1917; Queenie was just 23 and left with three small children. Even more sadly, her two daughters died in the 1918 Spanish flu pandemic, aged 5 and 4, and her son was killed in World War Two, also at sea. Father and son shared both a name and a fate: George Bennett 1889-1917 and George Bennett 1915-1941. Queenie re-married and had three daughters: Isabel, Annie and Doris, the youngest, my Mum. She lived through the next pandemic Covid-19, a hundred years later, and died aged 97.

During my trip to the obelisk, my friend, Rita also told her story - she had been at the original unveiling in 1952. Then, when I bumped into Rita some time later, she related how something exciting had happened:

“In 2023 I went to the Commonwealth War Graves tour at the memorial on the Lines and Tony our guide mentioned that the Duke of Edinburgh had unveiled the World War Two bronzes in the early ‘50s and I told him I was actually there on the day. So when I visited the site again on the 11th May *this* year [2024] for another talk and tour, he asked me if I would be willing to take part in a rededication ceremony the CWGC was planning to hold, as the World War One memorial would be 100 years old. I was then contacted by Sarah Nathaniel, their Public Engagement Coordinator South East and asked to take part in the *Lighting Their Legacy* and rededication event being held at the Chatham Naval Memorial on 18th May 2024. My role would be to pass on a torch to a young Naval Cadet at the Torch Lighting Ceremony.* Sarah also asked me to say a few words about attending the Duke of Edinburgh's 1952 unveiling of the World War Two plaques, and this is what I said:

The Battle of Ellendun would also eventually lead to English unification, as more kingdoms of the old Heptarchy were absorbed into Wessex. England was briefly unified under King Æthelstan (r. AD 924–939), but it was not until the reigns of the likes of Kings Edgar (r. AD 959–975), Cnut (r. AD 1016–1035), and Edward the Confessor (r. AD 1042–1066) that England was truly unified.

References

Swanton, M. (ed.) (1996) *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*. Translated by M. Swanton. London: Phoenix Press.



*The location of Wiltshire.
Nilfanion, Wiki Commons.*

Aliens and the Strood Union Workhouse The Blesch Family

Deborah Collins



Deborah lives in Medway and has been studying Kent Poor Law Unions and parish workhouses for more than 10 years. Her research has uncovered many different aspects as to how the Kent Poor Law Unions affected the lives of all people and not just the poor. Her research of parishes properties has also made discoveries of how parishes used several different methods to house their poor. She has a website dedicated to the subject of Kent Workhouses and Poorhouses: <https://kentworkhouses.uk/about/>

Part One

The outbreak of the First World War affected all sections of society but there was one group which is rarely written about but who had their lives torn apart by separation from their husbands. These were the British born wives of enemy aliens.

The day after Britain had declared war with Germany on 4 August 1914, the Aliens Restriction Act was passed which required *aliens* to register with the police. Their movements were also restricted and they could be interned or deported, even if they had spent many years living and working in Britain. Within days German men, including the husbands of British born wives, were being interned and their families were left without their main source of income.

In November 1914, the British Government acknowledged that distress was being caused to British born wives of enemy aliens and they made arrangements for money to be made available for them if they were unable to support themselves, and this was paid via the Poor Law Unions. One of the families for whom the Strood Union became responsible was that of Johannes Gottlieb Daniel Blesch.

A Visit to the War Memorial on the Lines

Hazel Thorn



Hazel was born and has lived in the Medway towns all her life. She spent 30 plus years working in Kent and Medway Libraries and first got into local history working with a blind local history librarian at Springfield. She was one of the AIM group who produced the two volumes of Times of Our Lives recording the lives of the women in Medway, and then Dewponds and Doodlebugs, history of Walderslade for the Kent Arts and Libraries. More recently Hazel helped the late Doris Herlihy with her project on Parkwood. She is on the FPOGA committee and also enjoys photography, crafts, and stamp collecting.

Back in May 2024, some friends had tickets to go to a talk at the War Memorial on the Chatham Lines, or the Great Lines Heritage Park, and suggested I book to go along too, for a small donation. We arranged a meeting place and walked up there. I am ashamed to say I had never been there before, though it's a beacon on the hill above Chatham and I knew my grandmother's first husband and their son were both named on it. There, I unexpectedly met another friend, Rita Mew.

This was a local event, organised by the Common War Graves Commission (CWGC), part of a nationwide guided tour offered between May and November annually, with over 300 guides and speakers delivering general or specific talks on subjects ranging from the individuals named, architecture, horticulture and conservation. Our guide on the day was Tony Matthews, a mine of information. He explained that there are three memorial obelisks in the country: at Chatham, Plymouth and Portsmouth. The Chatham one was unveiled in April 1924 by the then Prince of Wales, later King Edward VIII. The memorial was extended after World War Two to incorporate the names of those lost in that second conflict; Prince Philip, then Duke of Edinburgh, unveiled this in October 1952.

2. *Half a peck* is an old measure of dry volume and the internet provides a picture from America where the term is still occasionally used, such as for a 'half peck' bag of about 15 apples. A *peck* is also found in the nursery rhyme, *Peter Piper*.

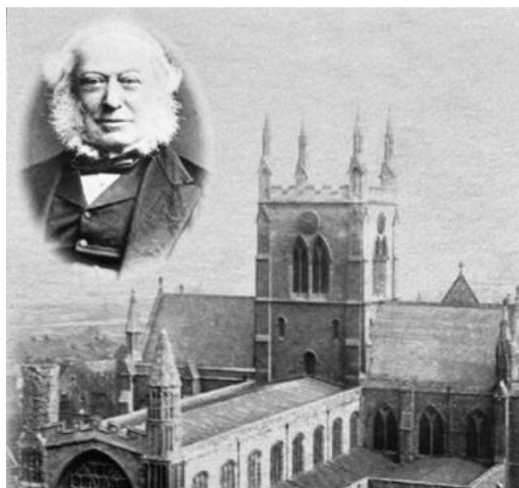
In the *Maidstone Gazette & Kentish Courier* January 13, 1846 there is an advertisement for a house to let - it is the scene of the crime:

House, premises, garden, and about two acres of meadow, in the occupation of Sir John Marshall, Gillingham. Rent moderate. For particulars and cards to view, apply to Mr J L Levy, Rochester.

Peter Bursey's cousin, the author Jon Bursey, has written a new book, as follows.

CLOISTERED SCANDAL Robert Whiston and his Campaign against Cathedral Corruption

A new book by Jon Bursey



The compelling story of Robert Whiston's Campaign against the misuse of cathedral funds by the Dean and Chapter of Rochester Cathedral. *Cloistered Scandal* by Jon Bursey is an account of the dispute (1848-53) between Whiston, Headmaster of the Cathedral Grammar School, and the senior clergy over their use of cathedral revenue to inflate their own incomes to the detriment of the scholars whom they were required by law to support. The book sets the campaign in the context of educational and ecclesiastical reform, and of Whiston's own career as Headmaster, magistrate, councillor and scholar. Available online and at all good book shops: ISBN: 978-1399983426; RRP £10. Jon Bursey is the author of *Captain Elliot and the Founding of Hong Kong, Pearl of the Orient* (Pen & Sword History, 2018).

According to the 1901 Census, Johannes had been born in Baden, Germany in about 1869. When and why he left Germany I have been unable to find out but, on 11 November 1899, he married Emma Kate Francis in the parish church of St Anne Limehouse, London.¹ Johannes was recorded on the marriage certificate as a Commercial Salesman and his father Michael as a Head Schoolmaster. Emma had been born in 1879 in Sway, Hampshire to William and Mary Francis and, according to census returns, William was an agricultural labourer.

Johannes and Emma had seven children, the first two of whom (Johannes George Rudolf in 1900 and Gustave Adolph in 1901) died within a few months of birth. The remaining children, Percy Herbert (1902), Horace Leslie (1904), William Julius (1906), Frieda (1909) and Arthur (1913), were all born in London with the exception of the last child, Arthur, who was born in Rosherville, Northfleet. At the time of the 1911 Census, the family were living at 1 Gordon Road, Rosherville and Johannes gave his occupation as a Builders Labourer at the Imperial Paper-works.

Johannes appears to have been able to support his family without requiring any assistance from the Strood Union (to which the parish of Northfleet belonged) and the four eldest children Percy, Horace, William and Frieda all attended the local schools.² However, this was all about to change following the declaration of war with Germany on 4 August 1914.

On 11 September 1914 Johannes was arrested and interned at Peel on the Isle of Man.³ Without her husband to support the family, Emma was forced to seek assistance from the Strood Union and this was given to her with the payment of 12 shillings and six loaves of bread a week for her and her five children.⁴ This relief was paid from the funds of the Strood Union (raised from the Poor Rates) until November 1914 when the Government took over the payment. At their meeting held on 29 November 1914, the Strood Guardians agreed to pay not only Emma but three other families money from this fund.⁵

Weekly payments and relief with food continued to be made to Emma and her children but Emma's health was not good and in March 1915 it was recorded in the *Applications and Relief Book* that she was 'not strong'. Then In August 1915, Emma was very ill and she was admitted to the Gravesend Hospital, Bath Street for an operation.⁶

How long Emma was in hospital for and what type of operation she had is unknown, but she and her children continued to receive relief during and after her return from hospital. It is also unclear what happened to her children during this spell in hospital.

By the end of September 1915 Emma was at home at 1 Gordon Road and receiving out door relief with it being recorded that she was 'not strong' and had 'Debility after operation'.⁷ On 28 February 1916, Emma was again very ill and was admitted once more to Gravesend Hospital. On this occasion her children, Percy (13), Horace (11), William (9), Frieda (7) and Arthur (2), were admitted to the Strood Union Workhouse in Gun Lane, Strood.^{8 9} After staying in the workhouse for a few days, to make sure they were not carrying any contagious disease, the children were separated and sent to the Union's *Scattered Homes*. Percy, Horace and William were sent to Lymptstone Scattered Home and Frieda to Lorne Villa Scattered Home. Arthur, being only two years old, remained in the Nursery within the Workhouse under the care of the Nursery Attendant until 12 June when he was then sent to Lorne Villa Scattered Home.^{10 11 12 *}

Meanwhile on 17 May, William, having presumably left the Scattered Homes without permission, was brought back to the workhouse by Police Constable Barrett with another boy, James Elphick, and promptly returned to the Scattered Homes. This would not be the last time that one of the Blesch boys would come to the attention of the Guardians.¹³

By early June, Emma was again at home and was given out relief due to 'Debility after operation', but it was also recorded that 'Woman had to leave Gravesend Hospital before being cured, bed being wanted for Urgent Case. Temporary Assistance by RO'.¹⁴ With her was her second eldest son, Horace, who had earlier been discharged on 15 May from Lymptstone Scattered Home to his aunt.¹⁵ At some point after this, Emma was sent to a convalescent home to aid her recovery and was home again by 4 August, as it was recorded that, 'Woman discharged from Convalescent home yesterday; is Very ill, and quite unable to do any work whatever. Temporary Relief by RO.[Relieving Officer]'.¹⁶ Shortly after this, on 9 August both Emma and Horace were admitted to the Strood Union workhouse and on 11th, Horace was transferred to Lymptstone Scattered Home.^{17 18 19}

And finally, there is a comment also in the same paper:

We have no doubt at all that Sir John Marshall's course was dictated by the general spirit of philanthropy but we also question whether it is for their (the poor's) real good or for the real good of the rich. ... Sir John, it would appear, has been very scurvily treated by the reporters. He says that he paid 7s towards lessening the claim upon his mother ... we were very glad to hear it, and only sorry that Sir John did not pay the other 8s and we dare say that to him the amount was of no great consequence but we are at a loss to reconcile the fact that with the following paragraph which we copy from the Rochester Gazette of Tuesday last:-
'Mrs Millan, the mother of the lad who was last week convicted of stealing walnuts attended at the County Magistrates Office yesterday morning to pay the fine and costs of the case saying the money had been given to her for the purpose by Captain Underwood, a gentleman living at Gillingham. Other sums have been forwarded with the same benevolent view.'

We do not know where Sir John's seven shillings went to, so that remains a mystery but, as the case was reported in many newspapers around the country, and some of them (apparently including *The Times*) with negative comments, there was some national opprobrium towards Sir John Marshall. The *Walnut Case* seems to be another example that contributed to the continuing social radicalism in the country which had gained momentum since the conclusion of the Napoleonic Wars. A Royal Navy captain's mind might naturally turn to punishment for breaking the rules of society, but he also was aware of the plight of the poor. Mrs Mellum and her family were not, however, living in poverty as the culprit's father was a marine artilleryman from whom she received six shillings a week and this was on top of the money she received for her work as a laundress. Hundreds if not thousands of military families lived on a similar amount (my own great grandparents included) and did not produce offspring that ended up at court. But, it is an interesting case that asks questions that are still discussed today.

Notes

1. The spelling of the boy's surname varies and the only reference that I feel with certainty is the same individual is a James Mullen who was admitted to the Medway Union Workhouse in 1880 and was born in 1831, i.e. he would have been 14 in 1845.

9. Strood Union Workhouse Admission & Discharge Book G/ST/WIa6 1913 – 1916.
10. Strood Union Workhouse Admission & Discharge Book G/ST/WIa6 1913 – 1916.
11. Strood Union Lymptone Scattered Home Admission & Discharge Book G/ST/CIa/2 1907 – 1931.
12. Strood Union Lorne Villa Scattered Home Admission & Discharge Book G/ST/Cia/3 1909 – 1923.
13. Strood Union Porter's Book G/ST/WRp/3 April 1916 - August 1916.
14. Strood Union Relieving Officer's Applications and Report Book Northfleet District G/ST/RA/14 September 1915 - March 1916.
15. Strood Union Lymptone Scattered Home Admission & Discharge Book G/ST/CIa/2 1907 – 1931.
16. Strood Union Relieving Officer's Applications and Report Book Northfleet District G/ST/RA/14 September 1915 - March 1916.
17. Strood Union Porter's Book G/ST/WRp/3 April 1916 - August 1916.
18. Strood Union Workhouse Admission & Discharge Book G/ST/WIa7 May 1916 - November 1920.
19. Strood Union Lymptone Scattered Home Admission & Discharge Book G/ST/CIa/2 1907 – 1931.
20. Strood Union Porter's Book G/ST/WRp/3 April 1916 - August 1916.
21. Strood Union Porter's Book G/ST/WRp/4 August 1916 - January 1917.
22. Strood Union House Committee Papers G/ST/AMP/2 January 1917 - December 1917.
23. Strood Union House Committee Minutes G/ST/AM/38 1914 – 1922.
24. Strood Union Workhouse Admission & Discharge Book G/ST/WIa7 May 1916 - November 1920.

Editor's Note

*Lorne Villa Scattered Home later housed Strood Library. In *The Clock Tower*, Issue 50, May 2018, we published an article entitled *The Old Strood Library*, by Amanda Thomas, which explained, 'Strood Branch Library was housed in Lorne Villa from 1947 to 1973 when it was closed for demolition. The new purpose-built library was opened on 14 March 1974 by local M.P. Mrs Peggy Fenner; at the time it housed over 20,000 books (see <http://medway.adlibhosting.com/Details/archive/110042795>). It is, of course, the site of the present Medway Archives Centre. A photograph of Lorne Villa can be found on page 47.

The 1845 Walnut Case: A County Court Case that caused a (brief) National Debate

Peter Bursey



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

In the August issue of *The Clock Tower*, I introduced captain Sir John William Phillips Marshall (1785-1850), Superintendent of Quarantine at Stangate Creek from 1827 to 1841. In 1845, while still living in Gillingham, he took a boy to court for the crime of stealing walnuts from a tree in his garden. The story begins in an 1845 newspaper report (*Morning Advertiser*, 1 October) from the Rochester Petty Sessions of 29 September:

A little boy, named James Mellum,¹ was placed in the felon's dock of the County Court, at Rochester, charged with having knocked down some walnuts from a tree, the property of Sir John Mashall, Knt, K.C.H., at Gillingham. The damage done was valued at sixpence. The little boy pleaded guilty.

The magistrate passed a sentence of a fine of 6d, the value of the walnuts, together with 14s 6d costs – making a total of 15 shillings. The mother of the boy, who lived at Gillingham, said that she could not afford to pay as she had a large family to support so the Chairman said he would grant her one month to pay the fine or the boy would go to prison for fourteen days.

In 1871 Alfred was living at 11 Gibraltar Place, Chatham with his parents Ambrose and Flemina and an older sister, Eliza. His father was 84 years old and described as a 'lieutenant colonel in the Royal Marines'; Alfred was described as of 'no occupation'. The family employed two live-in servants. Flemina Wolrige died in 1888 and was buried in the Chatham Maidstone Road Cemetery; Ambrose died in 1891, aged 94 and was buried with his wife on 15 July. In his will, proved on 12 November, he left a personal estate of £2,395 13s (the equivalent of about £197,500 today). By the time of the 1891 Census, Alfred was in lodgings in Whittaker Terrace in Chatham. He was still single and described as 'living on his own means'. He died on 28 June 1893, aged 50 and was buried in the family grave. When his will was proved, his estate was valued at £138 (£16,250 today).

The above is just a very small sample of the cases included in the Chatham Court Records. As I have already said, we are at present listing those from the 1870s, although we hope to expand this in the future. If you have ancestors who lived in Medway during the 1870s it could be worth your while to contact the staff at the Medway Archives Centre to see if your names are included. Remember, victims are included as well as offenders, so one way or the other you could add some interesting colour to your family tree!



Chief Inspector Brooks of Rochester City Police standing in Castle Gardens 1903-05. Brooks was appointed sergeant in 1884 and made inspector 1903. Guildhall Museum Image A7159/27; Guildhall Collection; reproduced with the kind permission of Dr Jeremy Clarke, Guildhall Museum, Rochester.

Chatham Police Court Records

Pauline Weeds



In 2005 Pauline Weeds was awarded the Higher Certificate in Genealogy by The Institute of Heraldic and Genealogical Studies. She has been involved in research for the England's Past for Everyone projects as well as transcribing for a Kent Archaeological Society project. She is a volunteer at the Medway Archives Centre, and a member of the committee of The Friends of Eastgate House. She has recently written a book on the history of the house and its most famous occupants entitled, The Buck Family and Eastgate House.

In her report in the last *Clock Tower* (November 2024), Medway Archives Manager, Helen Worthy drew attention to one of the volunteer projects which is currently ongoing at the Archives. As one of the volunteers involved in this project, I should like to tell you something about it and how it may add to your family history and paint a picture of Chatham at that time. The years we are listing initially from the Chatham Police Court Records are from the 1870s, and there are many hundreds of names here, both prosecutors and defendants.

Certain crimes appear regularly, and often throughout these records, and probably make up the majority of the cases. Licensees were sometimes in trouble for having their premises 'open after hours' and their customers for being 'on licensed premises out of hours'. On 4 February 1875, Edward Coppinger, Superintendent of Police, made fourteen arrests on licensed premises after hours. Being 'drunk and disorderly on the streets' was the cause of many arrests, as were prostitutes plying their trade 'on the Brook Chatham', 'on New Road, Chatham', 'on High Street Brompton' and elsewhere. Unmarried mothers seeking maintenance orders from errant fathers, dog owners without dog licences, members of the forces who had made false statements on their sign-up attestations, and others who were deserters can all be found in these records.

Loan Societies such as The Rochester Chatham & Strood Loan Society and The New Brompton Kent Loan Society turn up now and again prosecuting clients who have failed to repay all their loan. Assaults appear quite frequently as well, although they often did not go to court, especially where a couple was involved, although the names can still be found there. Thefts, again, are quite common but some appear really trivial today.

The number of children who appear in these records, say between 8 and 15 years old is quite eye-opening, as are the very severe punishments handed out to some of them. Children 'throwing stones' appears to have been a problem in Chatham at this time and the Chatham Local Board of Health seemed intent on solving it with several prosecutions. However, the case they brought against Lewis Ridley, aged just 5 in February 1876, for 'throwing a stone in Alfred Street, Chatham' was mercifully abandoned without explanation.

I have selected a few of what I hope are some of the more interesting cases and with the aid of just a little research in the local newspapers - which are on microfilm at Medway Archives - and the census records, which can be seen on both Ancestry and Findmypast, I have tried to fill in the stories. Some criminal records are also available on Ancestry and Findmypast.

Obadiah Bottle and Robert William Inman – 10 July 1873

I was immediately drawn to one of the first cases I entered on the computer by the unusual names of those involved. Obadiah Bottle and Robert William Inman were two young labourers in Chatham Dockyard who were described as having been on the 'most intimate terms'. However, on 15 July 1873 they engaged in a fight which was said to have been of Obadiah's 'own seeking'. The fight took place on Fort Pitt Fields in the presence of several people. They fought twelve rounds after which Obadiah became unconscious and died before he could be taken to hospital. Obadiah was just 19 and lived with his parental family at Court Hall Lane in Rochester where his father worked as a shoemaker. Robert was 20 and had probably migrated from St Luke's, Islington in search of work at the Dockyard. In his evidence Obadiah's father said that the two young men "appeared like two brothers." After three hours deliberation, the jury returned a verdict of manslaughter against Robert William Inman and he was committed for trial at the Maidstone Assizes. He was bailed on his own recognizance of £40 and two sureties of £20 each.

Arthur Murphy – RSPCA Inspector, Chatham, James Batt of Strood; Thomas Sellen of Sheerness – 8 March 1875

Arthur Murphy appears to have moved in about 1865 to Chatham where his youngest son was born. A notice in the *Maidstone Journal* dated 8 May 1865 reads, 'Persons witnessing cruelty to animals communicate with Mr Arthur Murphy, Arctic Cottage, Mount Pleasant, Chatham Hill.' Both the 1871 and 1881 Censuses show that Arthur was a saddler by trade. He must have combined his trade with his work for the RSPCA which covered a large area of North Kent and appears quite frequently in the court records. The following are just two of his cases, both heard at Chatham on 14 June 1875; both offences took place on 8 June 1875.

James Batt, aged 21 of Strood, was convicted of 'conveying a sheep in a van in a manner to cause unnecessary pain and suffering'. He was sentenced to fourteen days in Maidstone gaol with hard labour. The following year he married Rosetta Naylor at St Mary's, Chatham and went on to have a large family. Thomas Sellen, born in 1853, was a farm labourer. He was unmarried and lived with his family at 70-71 Alma Street in Sheerness, where his father was a licensed victualler, carman and farmer. He was convicted of 'cruelly ill-treating a mare at Chatham' and sentenced to twenty-one days in Maidstone gaol with hard labour. A skim through The British Newspaper Archive suggests that Thomas was in trouble on a number of occasions for animal cruelty. He died on 11 December 1876, aged 23/24 and is buried in Sheppey Cemetery.

On 24 April 1886, the *Rochester, Chatham & Gillingham Journal* carried an announcement to the effect that Mr Arthur Murphy was 'seriously ill with an attack of paralysis'. He was buried just three days later in the Maidstone Road Cemetery, Chatham.

Alfred Wolrige of Chatham, gentleman – 30 December 1875

Alfred Wolrige is the only *gentleman* I have so far noted while working on the Chatham Court Records. He was brought up in custody on 30 December 1875 for 'malicious injury to a door'. He was discharged by the court because no prosecutor appeared in the case, so - sadly - we shall never know what the door had done to offend him!

I have been unable to discover what became of Bridget. Her husband, Peter, died on 22 January 1881 and was buried at Chatham St Michael's three days later. Her youngest son, also Peter, was killed in an accident at Chatham Dockyard on 29 June 1883, aged just 16; (*Rochester, Chatham & Gillingham Journal*). He was buried at the Grange Road Cemetery in Gillingham on 3 July 1883.

James Turner and Albert Charles Webb 14, William James Brown 12 and George Webb 14 – 8 March 1875

James Turner was a leather cutter with a long-established business at his home at 47 High Street Chatham. In 1871, his household consisted of himself, his wife Martha, one teenage son and one female servant. On 8 March 1875 three young lads, Albert Charles Webb, William James Brown and George Webb, were accused at the Chatham court of having broken into James Turner's home on 28 February and stolen £20. They were committed for trial at the Maidstone Assizes the following day. Albert and William pleaded *guilty* but George pleaded *not guilty*. The Assize Court judge and the counsel for the prosecution agreed that there was insufficient evidence to convict George, and he was acquitted. The judge considered Albert the worst offender because, 'having learnt to read, [he] had spent his time in reading bad books, which his Lordship thought was the cause of many crimes in this country. He was the worst partly because he was the oldest and partly because he had been in the service of the prosecutor. It was his first offence and let it be his last and do not let things which he read take such an effect upon his mind or it would lead him to misery'; (*South Eastern Advertiser*). He was sentenced to six months' hard labour and the younger boy, William, was sentenced to three months' hard labour.

After his telling off by the judge, and his imprisonment, Albert Charles Webb appears to have lived a blameless life. Married with two children, census records suggest he remained in some form of skilled employment until his retirement. He died aged 81 in hospital in Chatham in 1942 and was buried on 19 October at the Chatham Palmerston Road Cemetery. William J Brown was probably the son of Thomas and Mary Ann Brown who, in 1871, were living in the Royal Marine Barracks in Chatham where Thomas was a corporal. I have been unable to find out anything about his later life.

Robert appeared at the Assizes on 22 July where he pleaded guilty to manslaughter and was committed to gaol for one week without hard labour. On 8 March 1874, Robert married Helen Baker at Christ Church, Luton, Chatham. I have been unable to find out what happened to Robert and Helen after their marriage, but wonder if perhaps they emigrated after the distressing events of the previous year.

George Bruce Watson and Samuel Southgate, Charles Henry Florey, Mary Ann Southgate – 4 June 1874

Many of the cases in the court records involve defendants who were no more than children, usually between the ages of 8 and 15. On Thursday 28 May 1874, Samuel Southgate, aged 10, and Charles Henry Florey, aged 8, broke into the home of

George Bruce Watson, a minister of the National Scottish Church in Gillingham, and stole a pair of trousers, two waistcoats, two towels and other items. They appeared at the Chatham court on 4 June along with Mary Ann Southgate, a widow aged 49, Samuel's mother, who was charged with receiving the stolen items. Found guilty, Samuel was sent to prison for six weeks and ordered to be detained in a reformatory for five years while his mother was sentenced to twelve months hard labour in Maidstone gaol. The court obviously felt that Charles Florey, the younger boy, had been led astray and he was given a lesser sentence of seven days' hard labour and twelve strokes of the birch rod. His mother was cautioned to take more care of him in the future.

Mary Ann Southgate and her family had had a difficult few years. From at least 1867 both Mary Ann, her husband James and their children appear to have been in and out of the Medway workhouse until at least 1871 when one of her sons, William Henry, died there aged just 21. James had died the previous year (1870), and Mary Ann must have really felt the odds were stacked against her. It is perhaps not surprising that I could not find her and her children on the 1871 Census. They were probably living rough somewhere. Mary Ann died on 29 April 1875 in Maidstone just as her sentence would have been coming to an end. I have been unable to discover what happened to Samuel after he completed his sentence. Just one of Mary Ann's children, Frederick Edward born in 1859, appears to have lived a fairly settled life. He was employed as a caulker, married in 1893 and is believed to have had just two children, a son and a daughter. He died in 1942, aged 83.

The other young lad, Charles Henry Flory, was part of a large family. He was employed as a labourer in the dockyard, lived with his parents until his marriage in 1892 and is believed to have had four children. He was buried in Woodlands Cemetery in Gillingham following his death on 28 June 1949.

James Walker and George Shorter alias Walker – 6 July 1874

George was another young boy whom life had not treated kindly. He had been born in 1864 and was baptised at Hadlow in Kent on 25 February 1864, the son of John Shorter and Margaret nee Dawson, his wife. John Shorter died in 1866, aged just 23, and his widow, Margaret, married again to James Walker, a private in the Royal Marines Light Infantry. The wedding took place at St Paul's Chatham on 24 July 1868 and the couple are known to have had at least three more children all born at Chatham. James Walker and his stepson, George, clearly did not get on. On 6 July 1874, James took George, aged 10, to the court for stealing '6d in copper' (2½d today). Unfortunately, George had already been in trouble some six weeks earlier for stealing 3 shillings in silver (15p today) from an Edward Charlesworth, for which he had been sentenced to 10 days' hard labour. Because of this previous conviction, the court felt they must inflict a more severe sentence. 10-year-old George had to serve one month in Maidstone gaol with hard labour and five years in a reformatory.

We do not know exactly when George gained his freedom but sadly it did not last long. On 28 April 1880, he went into George Baker's shop in Rainham, ostensibly to sell some herrings he was carrying, but when no one was looking he stole a tin box and a sovereign belonging to Mr Baker and made off with them. The case was heard at St Augustine's court in Canterbury on 29 June 1880 and the court decided to give him 'one more chance'. He was sentenced to one month's hard labour and another five years in a reformatory; (*Kentish Gazette* 6 July 1880).

George served this last sentence at the Royal Philanthropic School in Redhill, to which he was admitted on 28 July 1880. The records for this establishment are held at Surrey Record Office and many are online. George's record is annotated 'emigrated to South Africa'. The school encouraged boys to emigrate rather than face unemployment and the consequent temptation to relapse into crime. Nothing is known of George's later life, but he would only have been about 20 when he emigrated and things could surely only have got better.

Francis Cook and others, London clothiers and Daniel Herridge, John Hoult – 4 January 1875

Messrs. Cook, Son and Co. were a long-established firm of clothiers based in St Paul's Churchyard, London. Francis Cook became head of the company in 1869 until his death in 1901, and the company's premises at 324 Chatham High Street, known as The Axe Brand Works, employed many Medway residents.

On 31 December 1874, Daniel Herridge and John Hoult were alleged to have stolen 65 lbs (pounds) weight of white cotton cuttings value 14 shillings (70p) from the company. Daniel Herridge was described as a 'carman in the employ of Messrs. Pickford'. He was aged 23, born at Brockenhurst in Hampshire and in 1873 married Clara Landall at St Mary the Virgin, Dover; the following year his daughter, Clara, was born in Chatham. John Hoult was a much older man. Born in 1821 in Thorndon, Suffolk, he signed up for the Royal Marines at Chatham aged 18 and received his discharge in 1863 after 22 years' service. In 1871 he and his wife, Anne, were running a grocer's and general shop at 217 Chatham High Street. Perhaps the shop was not doing too well, as at court he was described as a 'porter guilty of larceny as a servant', so presumably employed at the Axe Brand Works. Both men were committed for trial at the Quarter Sessions where Daniel was found guilty of 'simple larceny' and sentenced to two months in prison with hard labour. For 'larceny as a servant', John received a sentence of three months in prison with hard labour.

Bridget O'Neill and Thomas Collins – 4 January 1875

Bridget was the wife of Peter O'Neill. At the time of the 1871 Census they were living with their three young children, William, Ellen and Peter in Sawyers Alley, Gillingham. On Christmas Day 1874, Bridget was attacked by one Thomas Collins, a bricklayer of Chatham. In court on 4 January 1875, he was said to have attacked her violently on the head with a large stick. She became *insensible* and a doctor had to be called. Dr Francis Theobald Butler, of Garden Street in Old Brompton, attended and examined her injuries. He said that she was not out of danger yet as erysipelas might set in. Thomas Collins said that Bridget owed him money which she would not pay, but he seems to have gained little sympathy and was sentenced to six months' hard labour. The *Chatham News* records that he was 'evidently much astonished at the sentence'.