

Medway Remembers - The Launch of a Major New WWII Project at the Medway Archives Centre

On page 26, the Medway Archives Centre announces the start of a new World War Two project.

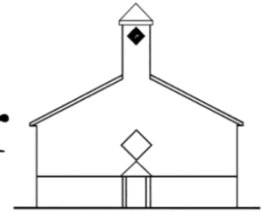


The Kent Electric Power Company memorial, Guildhall Museum Rochester.
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If undelivered, please return to:
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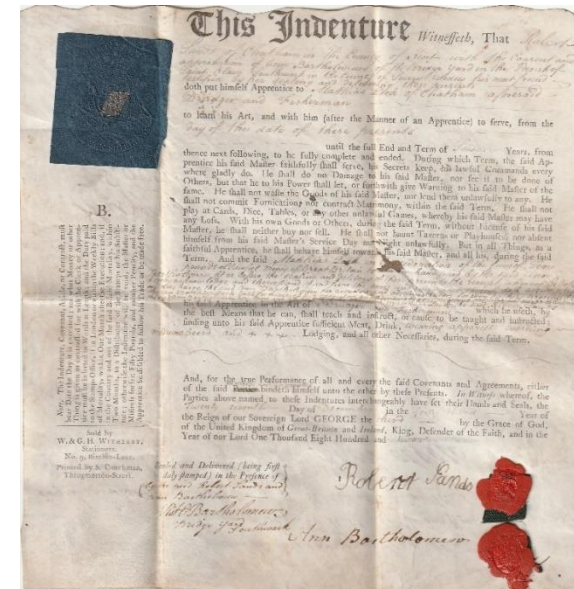
The Clock Tower



Issue Number 80: November 2025
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The Friends of Medway Archives
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Robert Sands, the Battle of Trafalgar and the Birth of FOMA



The apprentice indenture for Robert Sands with his signature bottom right. Sands' written account of the Battle of Trafalgar was purchased by the Medway Archives Centre in 2005 and was a key factor in the forming of the Friends of Medway Archives. Catharina Clement has recently delved deeper into Sands' life and her fascinating NEW research can be read on page 15.

ALSO INSIDE

The launch of a major new WWII Project at the Medway Archives Centre –
Medway Remembers. See page 26.

**Medway Remembers -
The Launch of a Major New WWII Project
at the Medway Archives Centre**



Rochester, Chatham & Gillingham Gas Company memorial. Copyright Medway Archives Centre

On page 26, Medway Archives Centre Manager, Helen Worthy announces the start of a major new project to build a searchable database of civilians and military service personnel from Medway who lost their lives in World War Two. A previously unrecorded war memorial board to the employees of the Rochester, Chatham & Gillingham Gas Company in Rochester has already been uncovered, as pictured above.

The new project follows on from FOMA's important work on their *De Caville Index* which lists those from Medway who perished during World War One (foma-lsc.org/wwi/).



**Medway Archives Centre
Christmas Drop-in**

Wednesday, 3 December 2025, 10am to 12noon

Join us for a friendly social with a small sale of old and new books and enjoy seasonal refreshments! Discover treasures from the archive of Percy Fitzgerald, (see page 10), and go behind the scenes to see the new Dickens Room!
It's free, there's no need to book - just drop in!



Wikimedia Commons

The Percy Fitzgerald Collection



On page 10, MAC Archivist, Sarah Trim-West explains how the 424 volumes of the extraordinary Percy Fitzgerald Collection has been rehoused at the archive. This move – made possible by additional funding - will greatly enhance access to the collection, and benefit Dickens scholarship.

*Part of the collection.
Photograph by Nikki Pratt*

The Committee

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The New FOMA Committee

We have had to make some changes recently to the FOMA Committee with the unexpected resignations of our Chairman, Chris de Coulon Berthoud and Vice Chairman, Rob Flood. Chris and Rob have decided to focus on their new company, Oral Medway, and we wish them the best of luck. In addition to this, in the summer, Steven Keevil also sadly left the committee. His other commitments were making it harder to attend meetings, however, we are delighted to say that we will continue to work closely with Steve in the future.

This meant we had some gaps in the committee. Cindy O'Halloran has stepped in as Interim Chairman and Sally Ironmonger and Amanda Thomas will be sharing secretarial duties until a new Secretary is appointed.

At the beginning of November, Will Train, Medway's Library Service Manager attended our first committee meeting since the reorganisation. Will often attends committee meetings and continues to be a huge support to FOMA, sharing future developments at MAC and ensuring we play an integral part in these. You will see in this issue of *The Clock Tower* that there is already a lot going on at the archive, and we will, of course, also be marking the 20th anniversary of FOMA in 2026.

We do feel that after 20 years, it is time to make some changes, to make FOMA membership more attractive and create more opportunities for members to get involved with local heritage. The new committee is proving itself to be quite a dynamic team and we have been discussing ideas – with Will Train's help – for a 're-boot'. We are gearing up for an exciting year ahead!

News of the committee reorganisation has got around fast, and we are delighted that there have already been approaches to join us. We do need as many members as possible in order to minimise individual obligation and to make being on the committee a positive – and fun – experience. It is likely that in light of future developments, spaces won't remain empty for long, so if you are interested in helping, please get in touch as soon as you can in order to avoid disappointment.

Please contact Amanda Thomas at editor@foma-lsc.org

A Very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year !

Obituary

Sir Robert Worcester

(21 December 1933 – 5 September 2025)



Sir Robert and Lady Margaret (née Smallbone, 1933-2020) pictured in 2007 at the time of Sir Robert's appointment as Chancellor of the University of Kent.

We were deeply saddened to hear of the death of FOMA Patron, Sir Robert Worcester, KBE DL on 5 September 2025.

Whilst we did not see Sir Robert very often, he was extremely supportive of the Friends and kept up to date with our activities, mainly through *The Clock Tower*.

In their obituary (11 September), *The Daily Telegraph* described Sir Robert as 'an American-born pundit who developed opinion polls in Britain as founder of Mori and, to his sleek pleasure, advised the Labour prime ministers Harold Wilson and James Callaghan. He made a fortune from the theory that the British elector, if stopped in the street by a girl with a clipboard, could be trusted to give an honest account of his voting intentions. Industrialists also turned to Worcester to gauge public attitudes.'

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, editor@foma-lsc.org

The copy deadline for Issue 81 of *The Clock Tower* is Monday 26 January 2026, with publication on Wednesday 18 February 2026.

Publication date

The fourth Wednesday following the editorial deadline.

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Front Cover Accreditations and Website Information

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

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

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

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 www.medway.gov.uk/archives or by writing to Medway Archives Centre, 32 Bryant Road, Strood, Rochester, Kent, ME2 3EP. Telephone +44 (0)1634 332714; email: malsc@medway.gov.uk

General information about the Friends can be made through the website <https://foma-lsc.org/> and via the Editor, Amanda Thomas at editor@foma-lsc.org Membership enquiries should be directed to the Membership Secretary, Natasha Boardman-Steer, natasha@creatobot.co.uk

FRIENDS OF CHATHAM TRACTION

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.

Medway Geographical and Local History Society

We now have a new venue!

As from 26 September we will be meeting at The United Reformed Church, Balmoral Road Gillingham ME7 4PU.
Meeting time 2.00/3.30pm.
Annual subscription £20. Visitors £4 per meeting.
As we're a Geography/History Society, two subjects for the price of one!

2025

Friday November 28: *The Yalding Floods*.

2026

Friday January 23: *Mexico*.

Friday February 27: *Theatre Royal Chatham*.

Friday March 27: *Wildlife of Costa Rica*.

Friday April 24: *Defending the Swale*.

Friday May 22: AGM.

ALL are Welcome.

Please contact Vanda Woollett 01634 389916. 0794 8277 131.

Lorna Bailey 01634 572139. 0795 7933 619.

Follow us on Facebook

Born in Kansas City in 1933, the only child of prosperous middle class parents, Sir Robert was acutely aware of his English heritage, his ancestors having (allegedly) arrived in Massachusetts from Warwickshire in 1639. This no doubt had a bearing on his love of Allington Castle, near Maidstone, where he lived from 1999, and perhaps also his shared enthusiasm for the Medway Archives' and FOMA's fascination with Pocahontas.

Knighthed in 2005, Sir Robert is survived by the sons from his first marriage to Joann Ransdell, Dr Angus Turner and Mr James Möser.



Sir Robert Worcester KBE DL (left), and MALSC Borough Archivist, Stephen Dixon, at An Evening with Sir Robert Worcester: Commemorating the 400th Anniversary of the Voyage to Jamestown, USA on 24th May 2007 at the Guildhall Museum, Rochester.

The event took place to mark the formal launch of the exhibition Pocahontas, An American Princess: The Birth of a Colony which ran until September 2007 at the Guildhall Museum. The central exhibit was the 1617 burial record for Rebecca Wroth or Rolf, alias Pocahontas, contained in the first parish register of St George's church, Gravesend, and held at the Medway Archives Centre. From The Clock Tower, Issue 7, August 2007.

Medway Archives Centre Report

Helen Worthy, Medway Archives Centre Manager



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 (MAC), our events and exhibitions, or about the services we offer.

Staffing News

We said farewell to Chris de Coulon Berthoud, our Saturday assistant, and wish him well. We have also welcomed three new members of staff since our last update, so you will see new faces when you visit! Please do say hello and introduce yourselves.

Alice Blake and Daniel Godfrey joined the team at the end of July. As casual assistants they help cover the desk when required and have also been busy re-packaging archive collections and helping in the strongroom. With other roles at the Historic Dockyard and the Royal Engineers Museum, they bring with them a wealth of knowledge and experience which benefits both the MAC team and our customers.

At the end of August we welcomed our new Archives and Local Studies Assistant, James Rice. With previous archives experience, and working towards an archives and records management qualification, James works both on the desk and behind the scenes on tasks including research for customers and archive retrievals. He is also currently working on the ephemera in the Dickens Collection ready for the opening of the new Dickens Room and is listing the Chatham building plans by local architect George E Bond.

Behind the Scenes...

How to Make an Appointment

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

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

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

The display runs from Monday, 10 November 2025 to Saturday, 14 February 2026 during normal opening hours (Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday 9am to 5pm, Saturday 9am to 12.30pm, closed on Wednesday and Sunday). It is free to view.

Christmas Drop-in

Wednesday, 3 December, 10am to 12noon

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

Discover treasures from the archive of Percy Fitzgerald, a friend of Charles Dickens, and go behind the scenes to see the new Dickens Room.

It's free, there's no need to book, just drop in!

MAC Spring Lecture Series 2026

Our lecture series is always extremely popular, and talks are usually fully booked, so please keep an eye out for our publicity over the coming weeks and make sure you purchase your tickets in plenty of time. Please note these are ticketed events and we are unable to sell tickets at the door.

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.

Parish Visits

As well as caring for the records of the parishes in the Archdeaconry of Rochester, we also offer advice and support to local parishes on the care and retention of records. We recently visited All Saints in Frindsbury and enjoyed a tour of the church as well. This historic and welcoming church with amazing views across Medway is well worth a visit.

Archives Taster Day

In September our Senior Archivist, Sarah Trim-West, ran an Archives Taster Day. These sessions offer a behind-the-scenes opportunity to spend the day experiencing life as an archivist in a local authority archive and are aimed at those wondering whether to pursue a career in archives and records management. If you know anyone who would like to attend our next taster session, please ask them to email us for further details at malsc@medway.gov.uk.

Dickens Room

Work continues on our new Dickens Room. Although this room is in a staff area, items from the collection can be requested for consultation in our search-room, and we are very much looking forward to offering behind-the-scenes trips to see the room at our Christmas Drop-in on Wednesday, 3 December 2025 from 10am to 12noon (see pages 9 for further details).

New additions to our collections include:

Acc1637: North Aylesford Remitted fees book 1943-1962;

Acc1638: Rochester Pageant book 1931;

Acc1640: Photos, deeds and conveyancing documents for Upnor Chapel;

Acc1641: photo album, Gillingham?;

Acc1643-Acc1652: North Kent Methodist circuit records;

Acc1653: glass plate negatives of Gillingham and Gillingham Carnival.

Please note all new additions are placed in quarantine and therefore may be temporarily unavailable, and some records have a closure period. Please contact us at archives@medway.gov.uk if you would like to know more about any of our recent additions to the collections.

Dates for your Diary

The best way to hear about 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 'Medway Archives Centre' and you'll receive a regular email keeping you up to date with our events programme and news. Further information may also be found on page 41 in *News and Events*.

Foyer Display - Robert Sands: Powder Monkey

One of the treasures held at the Medway Archives Centre is a manuscript written by Robert Sands, an account of his experience on board HMS *Temeraire* at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805. Call in to discover more about this young man from Medway, who was at one of the most famous battles in naval history. You can also read more about his story on page 15 in Catharina Clement's fascinating article. The display runs from Monday, 10 November 2025 to Saturday, 14 February 2026 during normal opening hours (Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday 9am to 5pm, Saturday 9am to 12.30pm, closed on Wednesday and Sunday). It is free to view.

Volunteers

Our MAC volunteers continue to support us with *Medway Remembers*. Please see the article on page 26 to learn more about our important new project!

Many of our volunteers gain valuable experience for future employment or postgraduate training opportunities. We are pleased to have two new volunteers, both of whom will continue our project to index our collection of Chatham Police Court records. These records offer a fascinating glimpse into the social history of Medway, and include crimes dealt with at the petty sessions including drunkenness, assault and prostitution, as well as women detained under the Contagious Diseases Acts and military deserters. This name index will eventually be available to our catalogue users, but for the time being please do get in touch if you'd like us to search for your ancestors' names.

A big thank you too to all our volunteers who regularly help at our events, greeting visitors and making teas and coffees for everyone – and tidying away and washing up long after the event is over. Our volunteers are vital to the running of events, and their assistance is greatly appreciated by staff and visitors alike.

Finally, a big thank you to the FOMA committee and members for promoting our services and collections, and for their help at our events.

News and Events

Calendar of Forthcoming Events and Exhibitions

FOMA Talks and Events

Please see the FOMA website for the latest details at <https://foma-lsc.org/>

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.

Medway Archives Centre

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

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Readers' Letters

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

Robert Dale; The Mystery of Rochester's Quaker School Resolved

20 August 2025

Hi Amanda,

Just read the latest edition [*The Clock Tower*, Issue 79, August 2025].

Robert Dale was a local Liberal councillor and conscientious objector in WWI. The young man (Pound) Tony Gray mentions was not, but Dale may have asked for him to be exempt on business grounds. Dale was short-staffed in 1918 as he advertised for other COs to help in the business who had shop experience. Aged 50 Dale had to argue his own case before the local tribunal in the summer of 1918 when the age for conscription was raised to 51.

When Robert Wilfrid Dale became mayor in 1924 he did so on condition he did not have to attend military occasions.

A recent enquiry at MAC on house history has also allowed me to identify the Quaker school located on St Margarets Street. In an article a few years back on Quaker education I left it open as unsure (editions May & Aug 2011). However, Canon Wheatley's archive notes have confirmed the house was Wingham Lodge with the lease to Richard Lambert Weston in 1823 as a school.

Regards
Catharina Clement.

You can read Catharina's article about Robert Sands and the Battle of Trafalgar on page 15.

Christmas/Collections Care Closure

Please note the Medway Archives Centre will be closed from Wednesday, 24 December 2025 to Sunday, 11 January 2026, re-opening on Monday, 12 January 2026.

This temporary closure enables us to work on tasks that cannot take place whilst we are open to the public. We look forward to telling you more in our next update.



Medway Archives Centre Christmas Drop-in

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Join us for a friendly social with a small sale of old and new books and enjoy seasonal refreshments! Discover treasures from the archive of Percy Fitzgerald, (see overleaf), and go behind the scenes to see the new Dickens Room!

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Wikimedia Commons

Come and View the Percy Fitzgerald Collection!

Sarah Trim-West, Archivist.



After securing some funding we have finally been able to rehouse our Percy Fitzgerald Collection in lockable shelves located in the search room at Medway Archives Centre.

For those not aware, Percy Hetherington Fitzgerald (1830-1925) was a close friend of Charles Dickens and is the reason why so much of Dickens' material has survived. Fitzgerald collected and preserved books, letters, and photographs relating to Dickens and donated them to the City of Rochester; they eventually made their way to Medway Archives Centre in 2007. Fitzgerald was also a founding member of the Dickens Society, and the society's first president.

In addition to his collecting, Fitzgerald was a prolific writer himself, writing some 300 books. Much of these were about or inspired by Dickens, and both his own writings and early editions of Dickens' can be found in the Percy Fitzgerald Collection.



Part of the collection.

Photograph, Nikki Pratt

We weren't supposed to wear trousers, but the assistant librarian (not me!) pointed out to the librarian that he didn't wear his kilt during the winter months, so we should at least be allowed to wear trousers during the colder months. It's surprising how long the cold weather lasted!

I tried successfully to teach some children how to read, but was stopped from doing this as I wasn't suitably qualified. The fact that the children could read after I had intervened, but not before, I thought was a good thing. However, some children could be a bit of a problem. One group decided to push all the books in the children's section to the back of the shelves, whereas the rule was that the books should line up near the front of the shelf for ease of access. When the children didn't stop their mischief I shouted loudly across the library, "When you have quite finished!" whereupon *all* of the customers queued up obediently at the desk to have their books stamped.

The library was close to a secondary school, where there were frequent skirmishes. It wasn't unusual for students to come in with broken limbs. We once had to lock ourselves in the library for our own safety when one of these skirmishes broke out.

Writing of being broken, the library was once broken into. The free-standing units were pushed over, spilling their contents all over the floor. The culprit escaped by jumping straight through one of the windows in the adjacent hall. We thought he might have been a jilted lover.

Finding fiction for the borrowers was quite easy, as someone had created a catalogue of the different genres and their authors. The non-fiction was a different matter all together, as I am no good with numbers. However, having worked in retail (see previous *Clock Towers*), I could remember the stock. After all, a library is just a giant shop full of books. I could take people to the appropriate book, because I had memorised where the main subjects were. A customer once offered to find the non-fiction book he was after if I would just tell him the Dewey number, but I had to take him to the particular book as I hadn't got a clue what the number was. We once had a request for a book on hovercraft. The librarian didn't know the Dewey number, but figured correctly that hovercraft should come somewhere between boats and planes.

The time and motion people came in once to inspect us. Unfortunately, they just timed the stamping of the books, taking no account of all the other tasks we performed. They didn't allow for telephone queries, general enquiries and the general interaction with the public.

I left the library as I was pregnant. It's funny what that book dust can do!

A Step Up (The Library)

Janet King



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

In this issue of The Clock Tower, Janet continues the story of her working life in the Medway Towns.

Things were looking up. My wages had gone from five pounds to twenty pounds a week. The reason for this state of euphoria was that I had secured a job at one of Medway's branch libraries. I had done some home study, which, together with my long hair and long legs, qualified me to work as a library assistant, not to be confused with the title of Assistant Librarian, which happened quite often. But who was I to put people right?!

The first job of each day was to tidy the books and to make sure that they were all in the right places. This was quite easy until a Saturday girl was employed who just put the books in any order in any available space. After we had sorted out this problem, which took some doing, it was time to man the desk. The borrowers didn't exactly come thick and fast, but trade was steady. A lot of the customers were elderly and some of them wanted us to guess how old they were, which called for some diplomacy. One man used to always ask if we had any Agatha Christies. I think we were supposed to remember the ones that he had already read. In the end he was let loose on the reserve stock that we kept in the back room to see if there was anything there that he hadn't read.

A lot of books still had people's bookmarks left in. A couple of the strangest I came across were an uncooked rasher of bacon and an *unused* condom.

To learn more about Fitzgerald please visit our online exhibition at https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200392/percy_hetherington_fitzgerald_exhibition. Our thanks to Jean Lear for her work on this.

The Collection is made up of 424 volumes. It remains largely intact and in relatively good condition, though sadly a small number of items have not survived. By storing most of the collection in the search room, Dickens researchers will now be able to more easily browse and explore the materials. Whilst the shelves are locked, staff are on hand to quickly retrieve any items researchers wish to view.

There are four aspects of the collection that may be of particular interest to researchers:

- Items devoted to the study of the *Pickwick Papers*.
- Biographical items relating to Dickens himself, including newspaper cuttings, sketches, and personal letters/notes.
- The number of early editions of Dickens' works that show how the works were tweaked from the original serialisation to the versions we know and love.
- *Fan* material shows how Dickens was viewed and loved within his own time.

In addition to this, Fitzgerald would annotate the works with thoughts, doodles, and anecdotes from Dickens. Many of these annotations give a glimpse on how Dickens approached his work and where his inspiration came from.

If you would like to view this wonderful collection, please contact us at archives@medway.gov.uk

There follows an article about the Percy Fitzgerald Collection, written by Norma Crowe, which was originally published in The Clock Tower in November 2007.

Percy Fitzgerald and the Study of Charles Dickens

Norma Crowe, Local Studies Librarian.



This article was originally published in The Clock Tower in November 2007.

Charles Dickens has long been associated with, and celebrated by, the Medway Towns. His connections with Chatham date back to his childhood, when his father worked in the pay office of the Dockyard. The area created a lasting impression upon him, reflected in both his writings and in his purchase of Gadshill at Higham in 1858; a house which he had admired from boyhood, and which became his home until his death in 1870.

These connections explain our interest in Charles Dickens' writing and his life, and explain why former colleagues at Rochester Library devoted time, energy and substantial funds to creating a special Dickens collection. The collection covers many aspects of Dickens' life and works, and is an important resource for scholars of 19th century English Literature. It was transferred to MALSC [the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre, now the Medway Archives Centre or MAC] when the Centre opened in 1992, and we have continued to add important new works to it, as funds allow.

This year [2007] our existing Dickens Collection has been enhanced by the transfer of the Fitzgerald collection of Dickensiana from the Guildhall Museum. Percy Fitzgerald was a personal friend of Charles Dickens, and was a devotee of his writings. Amongst the 400 volumes are some works of literary criticism; poems and songs based on Dickens' characters; sequels to Dickens' stories written by other admirers; obscure and foreign editions of the great author's books. In 1911, when he was 80 years old, Percy Fitzgerald donated this unique collection to the City of Rochester. It was housed in its own bookcase in Eastgate Museum. When the museum moved to the Guildhall the Fitzgerald collection went too.

Dated 11 December, 1940, the letter reads:

Admiralty House, Chatham.

Dear Mrs York,

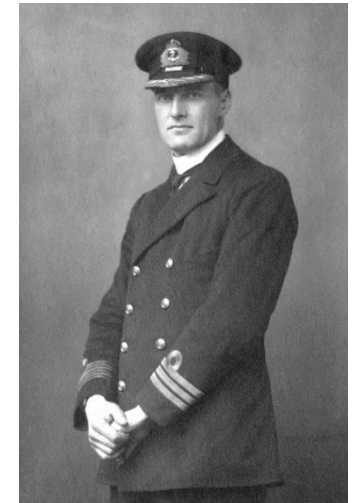
I enclose your membership card of the R.N.F.U.S.W. [Royal Navy Friendly Union of Sailors] & hope we shall see you often at Navy House on Thursdays. It is very kind of you to knit & I enclose the pattern of the jersey. If you have not enough wool to make the high collar, a round neck will be quite suitable, but I think you will find there will be enough. If you have any left over, please return it when the jersey is finished.

Yours sincerely,
Kathleen Drax.

Editor's Note

Glasgow-born Kathleen Drax (née Chalmers, 1893 – 1980) was the wife of Admiral Sir Reginald Plunkett-Erle-Drax (1880-1967); they married at Almer, Dorset in 1916. Drax was Commander-in-Chief, The Nore, from December 1939 to April 1941, responsible for the defence of The Nore, the sandbank at the mouth of the Thames Estuary and River Medway, a position which originated in the seventeenth century.

During World War Two, Drax was responsible for the shipping convoys travelling along the east coast between Scotland and London. Whilst he had a glittering career in the navy, immortality was achieved at the hand of his friend Ian Fleming, who named his character Sir Hugo Drax in the James Bond book, *Moonraker* in his honour.



Drax pictured in 1918; Wikimedia Commons

Chatham's Admiralty House was the official residence of the Commander-in-Chief, The Nore, from 1907 onwards, but was demolished in 1965.

Hazel's poem was inspired by a letter sent to her grandmother, Queenie York, as pictured below.

Dec. 11. 40. Admiralty House,
Chatham.

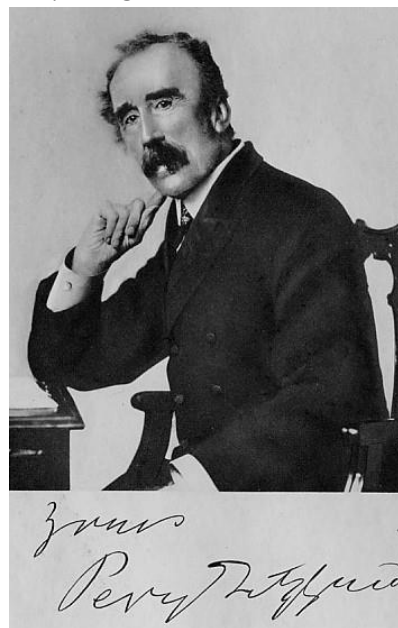
Dear Mrs York.

I enclose your membership card of the R.H.S.L.W. & hope we shall see you often at Navy House on Thursdays. It is my kind of you to knit & enclose the pattern of the jersey. If you have not enough wool to make the

high collar, a round neck will be quite suitable but I think you will find there will be enough. If you have any left over, please return it when the jersey is finished.

Yours sincerely,
Kathleen Drax.

Percy Fitzgerald



Having carried out an inventory and reassessment of the holdings at the Museum, curatorial staff came to the conclusion last year [2006] that the Fitzgerald collection should be relocated. It was under-used and largely unknown, and frankly, being a printed book collection, did not fulfil the collecting remit of the Museum. Suitable locations for the collection's new home were sought. Synergy with courses in 19th English Literature gave the University of Kent at Canterbury a strong case. But staff at MALSC and at the Museum, were sure that the rightful home was here at MALSC. After all, Percy Fitzgerald had given this his personal Dickens library to the City in perpetuity. We have a duty of care to preserve and promote it to scholars throughout the world.

So we have his books, but what of the man?

Percy Fitzgerald was born in Ireland in 1831. He was a solicitor, sculptor, critic and a prolific writer. He came to the notice of Charles Dickens when he was a young man. He was one of the group who worked with Dickens and helped to make *Household Words* the success that it was. He had a reputation for working fast, for his vast output, but regrettably for his inaccuracies or carelessness. Charles Dickens once wrote to him,

For my sake- if not for Heaven's-do, I ENTREAT YOU, look over your manuscript before sending it to the printer. Its condition involves us all in hopeless confusion, and really occasions great unnecessary cost.

Fitzgerald wrote about 30 novels and at least 11 books about Dickens and his literary circle, together with biographies of Garrick, Sterne, Sheridan and Boswell. In 1903 he became the first President of the Dickens Fellowship at the age of 73, and was a generous contributor to the Fellowship's funds. When the first Dickens Exhibition was held in 1902 he was delighted to provide many artefacts for display. Fitzgerald's last book was published in 1913, and he died at the ripe old age of 96.

We are grateful to him for his generosity in giving his unique collection to Rochester to be available to Dickens scholars in perpetuity.

The Household Words Office from Memories of Charles Dickens by Percy Fitzgerald published 1913; The Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre



Norma Crowe

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

A Poem of Remembrance

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.

War Time Knitting



We knitted for the soldier boys and sailor boys at sea
We knitted hats and socks, scarves and gloves, all made with love.

Tommy and Jack were fighting, they were cold they were wet they were scared,
a woolly from home is what they needed, a parcel from home warmed their hands
and their hearts,
They needed to know they were missed, we needed to know they were warm.

No nylon, acrylic, alpaca, just wool from a sheep from their home.
And while we knitted we chatted; it comforted us as we knitted for fathers
and brothers, uncles and if not for ours then another's son.

Now we're knitting poppies, red and purple and white
Red for the services, Tommy and Jack and Bill,
White for all the others, for many more were killed.
Purple for the horses, the pigeons and the dogs, who gave their all, not just then, but
now.

We salute you all.

The reference to the pub in London is intriguing, but all is made clear when a reference to Clement Taylor attending a meeting of ‘Hop Planters, Land Owners and others interested in the plantation of hops’ was held in March 1800 in Maidstone.⁵ The meeting was called to discuss the upcoming Bill proposing new duties on hops which would have ‘ruinous consequences’ if passed.

Further research into the Taylor family may shed more light on the City pub and the supply of hops for beer to it, but this aspect of the family business almost certainly centred on Linton on the other side of Maidstone. When his father died in 1813, William was the tenant of East Court Farm and it seems he decided that living in Gillingham in full ownership of the estate was preferable to moving to Linton. He and his wife had no children and, when he died in 1836, he left his estates to his nephew and others. One further item of interest in the letter is William’s reference to the Everest or Everist family. There were a handful of farms on the Hoo peninsular and Sheerness that belonged to them so that would explain their interest in obtaining timber for building repairs.

William’s paternal grandmother, Elizabeth Quelch (1702-1795), was from the Dartford paper-making family of Quelch, as was the mother of a cousin, another Clement Taylor, who was the MP for Maidstone between 1780 and 1796. This Clement’s mother was a Sarah Quelch so, the two families were connected which may explain William being invited, through his political connections, to provide evidence to the Select Committee in 1833. William Taylor (father of Clement) married Elizabeth Quelch (1702-1795) at Rochester Kent 5 April 1742.

Notes

1. *The County Fire Office 1807-1957: a commemorative history* by Aubrey Noakes, H.F.& G. Witherby: London, 1957, page xiii.
2. *Report from the Select Committee on Agriculture with the Minutes of Evidence Taken Before Them*. Ordered by the House of Commons to be Printed, 2 August 1833, pages 290-303.
- 3 & 4. Prerogative Court of Canterbury Wills 1384-1858 (available on Ancestry website).
5. *Kentish Chronicle*, 3 June 1800, p.1.

The Battle of Trafalgar: an Account by Robert Sands

Catharina Clement



In 2005, Catharina completed a BA in history at Canterbury Christchurch University, and in 2013 a PhD in local history entitled Political and Religious Reactions in the Medway Towns of Rochester and Chatham during the English Revolution, 1640-1660. She has been involved in various local history groups and projects such as FOMA, CDHS, and the Victoria County History EPE projects. She won the 2009 Friends Historical Society Award resulting in a paper on Medway Quakerism 1655-1918 delivered at the Institute for Historical Research and in 2016 at the Friends Library in London. Since 2014 Catharina has worked on a project for the Trustees of Plume Library. Currently Catharina works for the Medway Archives Centre.

On 5 July 2005 the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre, as it then was, acquired a written account of the Battle of Trafalgar. This manuscript was purchased by the former archivist, Stephen Dixon, at auction from Bonhams, New Bond Street, London. The item was brought to his attention by the curator of the Guildhall Museum, Peter Boreham, thinking this unique document might be of interest to the archives. It was advertised in the sales catalogue, ‘Nelson and the Royal Navy 1750-1815’, as lot number 169 with a pre-auction estimate of £2,000 to £3,000. Bonhams had done their due diligence and ascertained that this was by Robert Sands, a boy 3rd class, who served on board HMS *Temeraire* at the Battle of Trafalgar.

I purchased a copy of the sales catalogue, which has since been donated to the archives. The item is described as an ‘Account of Trafalgar, written or dictated in after years by Robert Sands, serving as a powder boy at the battle, 2 pages, folio, paper-losses at the head and foot (affecting a few words), slight browning and stained, passepartout frame (unexamined out of glass).’ Bonhams considered this was ‘a rare account from below decks of the Battle of Trafalgar, the author identifying himself midway through his account as a powder boy, seemingly on board the *Victory*. It is written in an uneducated hand, with phonetic spelling, and was either written or dictated sometime after the event (the wove paper would suggest a date of 1820 or

later). The author's first-hand memories of the battle have clearly been later influenced by published accounts ... but parts of the memoir more clearly reflect the author's authentic experience.'¹

This rare manuscript was purchased by Medway Archives for £4,800 with a single closed bid by the archivist: £1,000 came from archive funding and the remainder from several donations promised. At the time nothing was known of the provenance of the manuscript as the vendor had asked to remain anonymous. Both the paper and handwriting were deemed to be from the period 1820 to 1850, and Stephen had the frame removed and sent the document off for conservation. It is now part of the DE 1010 collection that can be viewed both online and in person at the archive.²



The Battle of Trafalgar depicted at the base of Nelson's Column in London's Trafalgar Square. Photograph by Rob Young, Wikimedia Commons.

On the next two pages is pictured the original account by Robert Sands, a single page showing sides one and two. Copyright Medway Archives Centre.

'I give and devise unto my son William Taylor my messuage, two cottages and other buildings, and several parcels of land containing one hundred and seventy acres known by the name of East Court in the parish of Gillingham now in the occupation of my son William Taylor' 'Also I give unto my said son William Taylor my messuage or tenement known by the name of the Red Lion situate lying and being in Nags Head Court [now Lombard Court] Clements Lane in the City of London now in the tenant or occupation of William Heeps. And also my messuage or tenement lying and being in Fetter Lane Fleet Street in the City of London now or late in the possession of [blank] George.'⁴

6332. Have you any land of the best quality?—I have some about my house of the best quality, but not the whole of my farm.
6333. What would be the value of your farm to rent?—I should say that my farm, taking it on the average, was worth about 30 s.
6334. What do you compound for?—14 s. 6 d. or 14 s. 9 d.
6335. Per acre?—Per acre for the arable land.
6336. And 7 s. 6 d. poor-rate you pay upon your own land?—I do now for these two or three years; in 1829 it was 5 s. 6 d., in the year 1830 it was 6 s., in 1831 it got to 7 s., in 1832 it was 7 s. 6 d. No man at the present prospect of corn could do any good with having that land above 30 s. an acre.
6337. Have prices been very steady for these last three or four years?—Pretty well, but not steady; but the last year the average was lower than it had been for several years.
6338. Do you think at the present prices the present rents can stand?—Certainly not; because for wheat you cannot get 60 s. a quarter on the average.
6339. What would you, as a land-valuer, in your scale for valuing land, put wheat at per quarter?—I could not carry it more than 60 s. per quarter.
6340. Would you venture to take it at 60 s. per quarter?—No, I would not.
6341. Supposing that a person wished you to value a farm for him as the incoming tenant, according to the present prices, what scale would you take for wheat?—Where the wheat was grown, for the best quality I think I should take, if the present Corn Bill stood, 60 s. a quarter; but then the quality of wheat varies so much.

6342. You

Example of replies by William Taylor of East Court Farm to the 1833 Select Committee Report on Agriculture, page 292

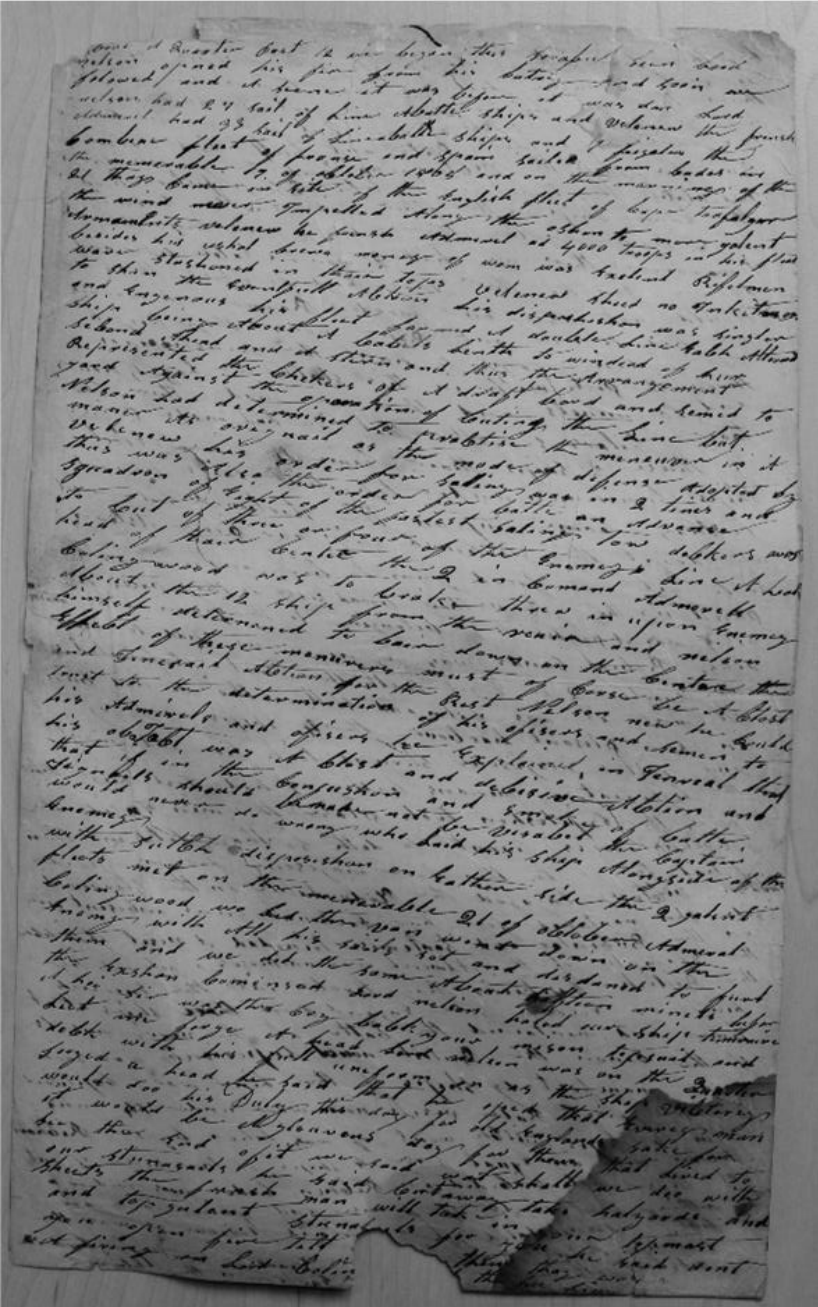
Turning now to the sender, a newspaper search finds a William Taylor, land surveyor, of East Court Farm, Gillingham, providing evidence to a Parliamentary Select Committee on Agriculture in 1833.² The Select Committee was appointed ‘to inquire into the present state of agriculture, and of persons employed in agriculture, in the United Kingdom.’ East Court Lane is the turning just before the Twydall roundabout (or Bowater’s roundabout as it was in my day). William Taylor’s evidence is one of those historical gems you come across so infrequently but recognise because of the sheer quantity of information provided – twelve detailed pages! The chances of there being two land surveyors in Gillingham in 1833 named William Taylor are very remote hence, although Taylor is not identified as ‘of East Court Farm’ Gillingham in the letter, the evidence Taylor provides to the Committee strongly suggests he is one and the same person.

William Taylor is asked by the committee not just about himself and his own circumstances, but about agriculture in general in north Kent. He is questioned on soil quality, the poor law, wheat prices, and the changes that have taken place between 1822 and 1833, and much more. He tells us that he had been employed as a land valuer for twenty years and that he followed his father in the profession. In north Kent poor quality land with heavy soil is let out at about 10s an acre but the best lands at 40s or even more. He himself has land valued at 23s an acre and his poor law rate is 7s 6d. in the pound.

The poor rate had increased in his area as there was more need for it in recent years. There was not as much work available as during the war and, in addition, the dockyard had laid off many men as a public expenditure reduction. Many of the unemployed were used by the parish on improving roads and digging gravel for transport to London.

A working man on a farm would earn 15s to 16s per week for task work and a daily labourer would get 2s 3d or sometimes 2s 6d per day. Before 1814 an able-bodied man could earn 3s a day but wages had not changed since 1814.

Further information about William Taylor is found in his Will of 1836³ where, apart from his farm in Gillingham, he is also in possession of a farm at Linton in Kent, a pub in the City of London at Nags Head Court, Clement’s Lane, and a house, also in the City at 23 Fetter Lane. These properties were inherited by William from his father Clement Taylor (1747-1813) and the will of the latter reads as follows:



... this time they began to fire on us so we
and went to town with us had them under our
them then we began our fire and shot
before that we had a shot but we could not
we went to them with our fire and shot
Run his ship the Victory on board the French ship
Doubtless the temerary is behind the French ship
the same ship on the other side it was the
Ship came on the other side of our ship the
temerary then we had a war on both sides and
so we fought them they had so black that we
could not see our wooden Ramer and we
we had to use our Bay we kept
the wooden worms to have the punishment
through the ports with in this state we lay to hours
and to minutes and that we made three strikes
then Colar so after that we had made quires
of these 2 ships that came to near it but
ships punishment under topmast sails bound
of them came up on the starboard side and
we kept the starboard ship our own distance
so to get our good gun to bear on them as they
passed us they gave us their broad side as they passed by
us I was a good boy belonging to the 9 gun on the main
deck Robert said was my name we had to bear
and Quarter 2 to get both the smoke exploded us
All most it was calm and still as the we had been
in some pleasant harbor the 4 ships went of
our office magazine showed took fire and burnt
the defendant of miscary ledgers I had best half the
win the explosion took place the men taking the
shoring was burnt to death so they told me then
I had to go to the gun magazine for my powder
the victory engaged the temerary on the starboard
side she mounted from her harbour gun and sent fire
on the British and sent her towards a vessel of 40
the British Captains then broke into the temerary
line on every side engaged 2 our ships at a
time and mounted the battle at the west mouth
of the baron the British naval superiority was soon
made manifest 4 ships of the line were captured
A more part of the vessels now were under 14 guns
then 4 ships with went of was taken by six British
ships with an equal force 4 ships of the line of out
of the rest subdued in British order was good for a
part of the fleet of France and Spain was good for a
knowing to us that we were in the
relief of us that we were in the
in Draxley about 1740 the
sailed on the 11th

They are cut[t]ing the Ash plantation and say that they are very particular as to leaving everything that is likely to become timber. I shall be in that neighbourhood on Monday next when I will go and see what they are doing. Mr Everist says they want some timber for repairing the barn dr and there are some elms that are dead top[p]ed and are not worth standing should it be your wish to have them cut down for the repairs, write and I will mark which ought to come down, I am afraid there is but little chance of obtaining a customer for the Estate at a fair price at present as everything as far as relates to business is very dull, but if you will give me an idea as to price I may by chance meet with a purchaser which I will give you the earliest information of. Now give me leave to thank you for your handsome present which we received quite safe. I can assure you that Mrs Taylor and myself are extremely sorry to hear of this severe indisposition of Mrs Bealby and hope the next letter I receive from you will give a more favourable account of her health to who, and yourself, Mrs T joins me in best respects, with the compliments of the season

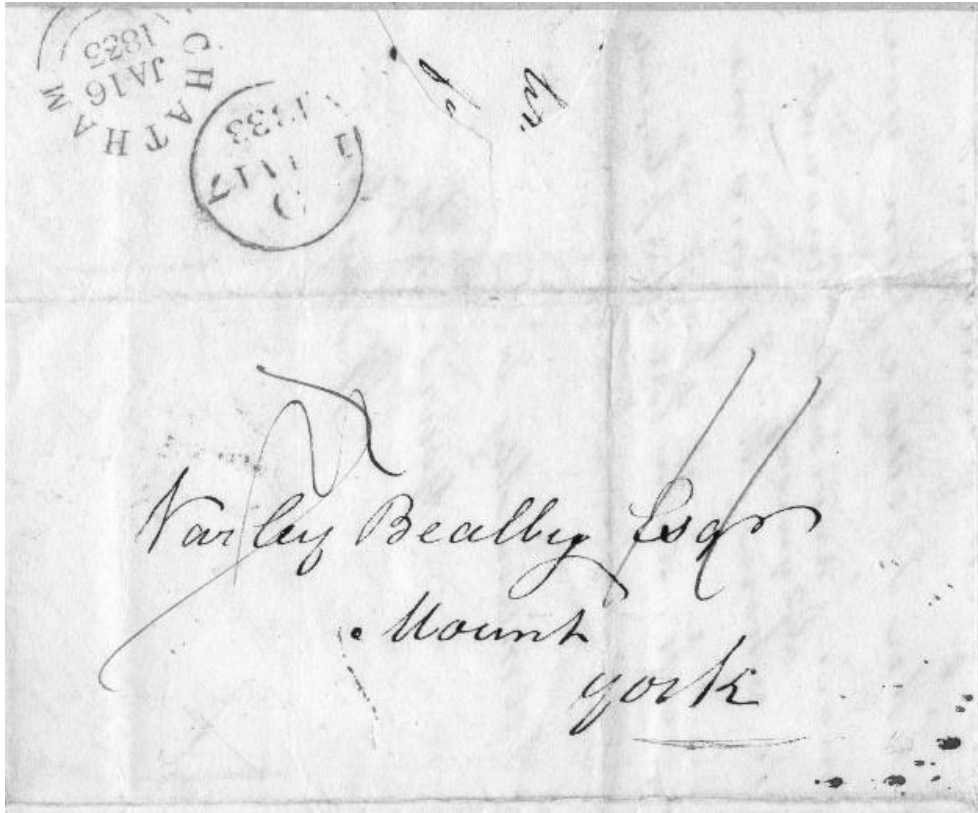
I remain my dear sir

Yours truly

W Taylor

Newspaper reports tell us that Varley Bealby was a Director of the York branch of the County Fire Office, an early fire insurance company founded in London in 1807. The company quickly became very successful so that the company's historian is able to say that 'the widespread agrarian unrest after Waterloo is reflected in innumerable entries [in the archives] concerning fired hayricks and burning country houses.

The County Fire Office carried more country risks on its books than any other insurance office at that period.' One of the reasons it was popular was that, 'after holding a policy for seven years, the policy holder would receive a refund of 25% of their premiums and could share in its profits without incurring liability for any of its losses'.¹ If one thinks back to 1830 and the agrarian riots (or Swing Riots) that occurred around the country, it may be that this letter is from a land agent to a fire insurance company about the aftermath of an estate or property that suffered and is now having to be sold. Kent was hit particularly badly by the rioters.



Here and on the previous page, the cover of a manuscript letter written 16 January, 1833 from William Taylor of Gillingham Kent to Mr Varley Bealby of Mount, York, Yorkshire (author's collection).

The full text reads as follows:

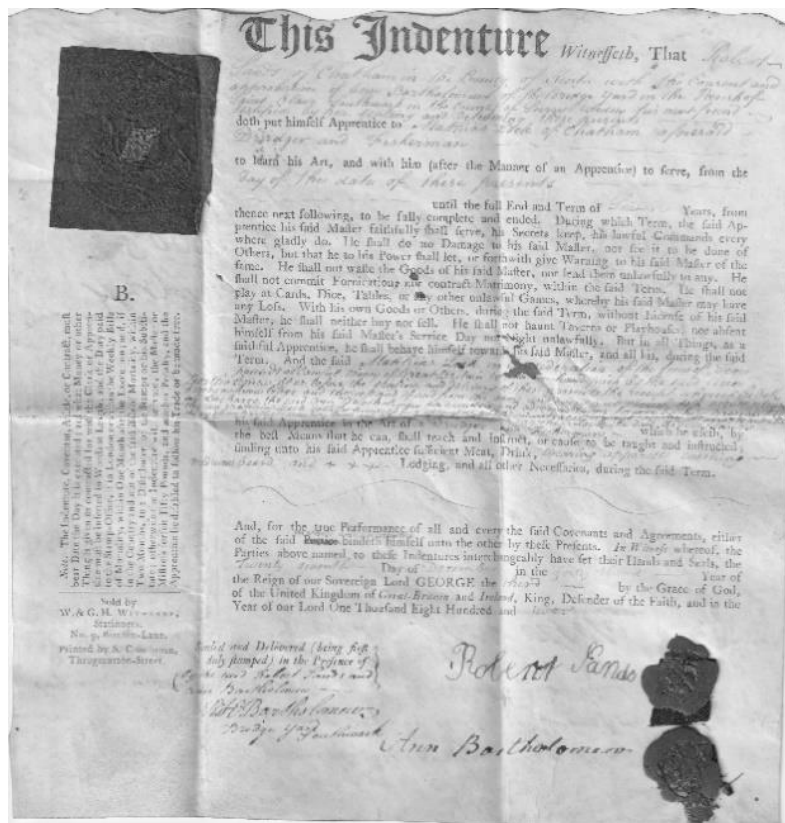
My dear sir

I am afraid you must think me very remiss in not answering your letter before, but have been from home for several days which prevented my having an interview with Mr Everist until yesterday, the result of which is that they are willing to take the farm as you propose on the former terms with the alterations of quit[t]ing by having six month's notice, and Mr Simmons is going to propose a just agreement to that effect.

So, who was Robert Sands? The manuscript account gives a tiny piece of information: he was a powder monkey or boy 3rd class. This is confirmed by both the muster and pay books of HMS *Temeraire* held at the National Archives, Kew. He joined HMS *Temeraire* on 1 September 1803 from HMS *Imperieuse* along with Thomas Turner of Chatham. According to this naval record, Sands came from St Margaret's, Rochester and was aged 15 when he joined the ship.³

But what is known of his earlier life? Robert Sands was born around 1788 in the parish of St Margaret's, Rochester. This parish extended from Borstal to Chatham Intra. The next record that gives any information about Robert Sands is his entry in the Rochester apprentice register where he is shown as apprenticed to Matthias Lock and described *as of Chatham*, suggesting that he was probably from Chatham Intra.⁴ Another unique document has recently been acquired by Ken Blackmore who has been researching the Matthias Lock family. He contacted the Medway Archives in 2024 with a view to depositing the records, however circumstances have arisen which have delayed this process. Mr Blackmore sent digital images of some of the documents relating to Matthias Lock in the hope we could give him more information on an indenture for Robert Sands. We were able to supply a little more background, but crucially the original of the Robert Sands indenture indicated that the apprentice was able to clearly sign his name to the contract.⁵

Robert Sands had been reasonably well educated. Rochester and Chatham had several schools at the end of the eighteenth century. Sands could have attended the British School in Troy Town or one of the many Sunday Schools established by both the nonconformist chapels and St Margaret's parish church. However, the Sunday Schools generally placed an emphasis on reading rather than writing in order to be able to study the bible and catechism, whereas at Troy Town Sands would have received a basic education in reading, writing and arithmetic.



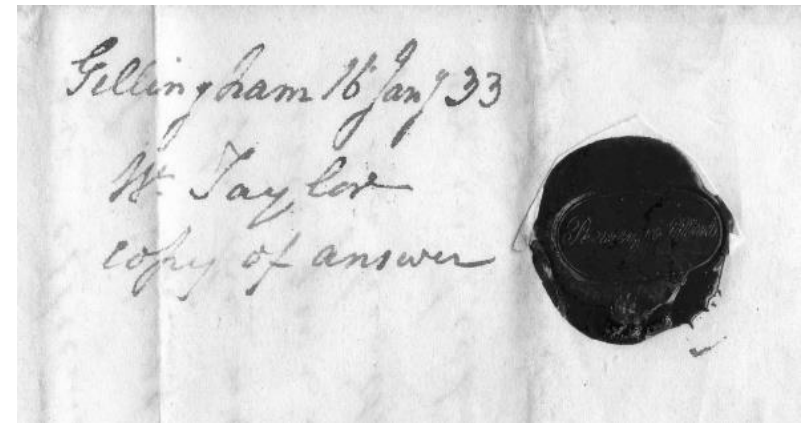
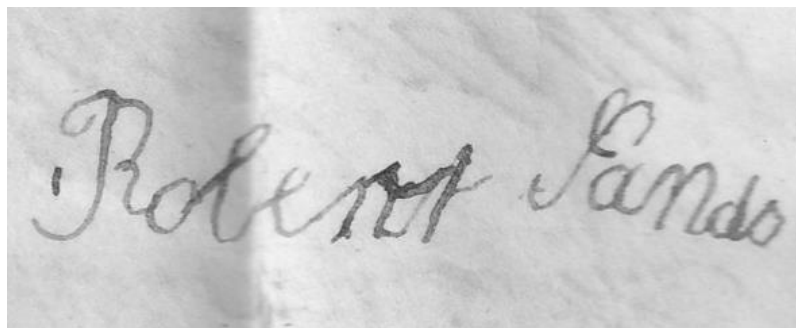
*Agriculture in Gillingham in 1833:
William Taylor of East Court Farm,
Gillingham
Peter Bursey*



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

A simple manuscript letter can sometimes offer an historian several avenues of research to pursue, and one such letter is the following from a land surveyor, William Taylor of Gillingham. The letter was written in 1833 to a Varley Bealby of Mount, York and concerns the selling of a local rural estate. Although not directly specifying it in the letter, I believe he is the William Taylor 'of East Court Farm, Gillingham' who gave evidence to a Parliamentary Select Committee on Agriculture in late spring 1833.

The apprentice indenture of Robert Sands and his signature enlarged.



Our volunteers then chose a war memorial in Medway to focus on and then headed home. Before long, we began to receive photographs of local memorials and research, all of which has been saved and will eventually be uploaded to our new microsite. This process is ongoing over the next year or so, and at the moment we have received research into about 130 individuals, both military personnel and civilians, who lost their lives during World War Two.

The value of this project is becoming clear, even in these early stages. We have found casualties that have not been recorded on local memorials, and casualties who do not appear on the Commonwealth War Graves Commission website. We have also discovered what may be a previously unrecorded war memorial board to the employees of the Rochester, Chatham & Gillingham Gas Company in Rochester (see page 2). We expect to find many more casualties, and the project will ensure that their names are not forgotten.

For some of our volunteers, it's proving a challenging task. Occasionally the names are difficult to trace, especially those with just an initial and a surname. While a positive identification may not be possible at this stage, we hope that members of the local community and families further afield will visit the microsite in future to help us identify those casualties who remain unknown. Certainly, this has been the experience with the *FOMA De Caville Index*.

It has been a humbling experience to read the stories we have received already, and to know that many more are still to come. As well as those who died in service whilst abroad, there have also been military personnel who died through accidents whilst training, or who tragically took their own lives. Others, including children, died as a result of the bombings. Despite the moving and often upsetting stories our volunteers have uncovered, they have all said they've found it rewarding, and many have felt a personal connection with the casualties they are researching. All have said how important this project is and are committed to their role in *Medway Remembers*.

If you would like to know more about this project, please email us at archives@medway.gov.uk. Whilst the microsite is still in its early design stage, we are hoping to compile folders of the research so that it is available to view at the Medway Archives Centre. These folders should be ready in the spring of 2026.

For more images, see page 2 and the back page.

Other theories have suggested that Sands came from East Peckham and ended up in St Margaret's parish workhouse. There is no evidence for either of these assumptions. A family historian has recently double-checked available records and concluded that Sands was an established local surname. Also, she considered that as Sands claimed to be born in St Margaret's, it was unlikely that someone from East Peckham would have been aware of the names of Rochester parishes. Having recently consulted the East Peckham overseer's records, I can confirm that this parish mainly dealt with its own poor in-house and rarely sent them to other workhouses; on the few occasions that they did, there are detailed payments shown in the accounts to the receiving parish. There are none for a Robert Sands to any Rochester workhouse⁶ and the nature of the apprenticeship (see the indenture pictured left) similarly discounts this view.

On 21 December 1802, Robert Sands, aged about 14, was apprenticed in Rochester to Matthias Lock as a dredgerman and fishermen. He was sponsored by Ann Bartholomew described as 'his next friend', probably his guardian, for a fee of £10. Ann was originally from Strood and owned property with her husband William Bartholomew on which the Zoar Chapel in Strood was later built. However, they had no direct connection with the chapel. Ann was buried in 1821 at St Nicholas, Strood and her will indicated she was *late of Maidstone*. She left nothing in her will to Robert Sands or the Lock family.⁷ The apprentice indenture was drawn up by her son Robert Henry Bartholomew, who was a London lawyer.

What is known about Robert Sands' apprentice master? Matthias Lock was the son of Matthias Lock of London, a carver, who had been placed by his father as an apprentice to Mayor Reynaud of Chatham. Lock acquired his freedom of the River Medway in 1791 for the sum of 6s 8d, which permitted him to take on apprentices and sell fish to the London market. He operated a *peter* boat called the *Matthias & Ann* and was from North Borough in Chatham.⁸ The boat, a double-ended fishing boat measuring around 12 feet in length, was named after himself and his wife, Ann Beacham, whom he married in Frindsbury on 28 January 1795. The couple had six children.

Matthias Lock died virtually destitute in Chatham in 1820 having lost his boat and pawned most of his belongings which were destroyed in the second fire of Chatham a few months earlier. He is recorded in the compensation list for the fire as having to resort to selling fish instead.⁹ It is possible that the Bartholomew family had connections with Lock's father in London and hence Sands' placement with Matthias Lock in Chatham. Robert Sands would have lived with his master in Chatham and the apprentice indenture indicated that Lock was responsible for his lodging, food and clothing as well as moral welfare.

Sands undertook to learn the trade, obey his master and not leave his master's service without his permission. Neither Ann Bartholomew nor Matthias Lock would have been best pleased when, just six months later, Sands left and joined one of the harbour ships at Chatham named HMS *Imperieuse*. There is mention in the HMS *Temeraire* records that he had also served on board HMS *Zealand*, but neither the muster nor pay books for that ship record him.

Now we will look in more detail at the Sands' manuscript purchased by the archives. As Bonhams has now since confirmed, it came from a vendor in Missouri, USA; possibly a naval collector but not a Sands' descendent. The narrative in the document suggests that it was dictated to someone, perhaps to record Sands' role in the battle for posterity. The manuscript states 'I was a powder boy belonging to the ix (ninth) gun on the main deck Robert Sands was my name.'¹⁰ It would seem logical, if Sands had written the document himself, that he would have signed or added his name rather than incorporated it into the text. A possible scenario is that Robert Sands was either very ill, or at the end of his life, and so decided to record his recollections of an important event in history for future family generations. Or was he perhaps prompted to do so by another historic event and encouraged by family and friends to capitalise on the opportunity to tell his story at public speaking engagements.

The historic event in question was likely the painting by the artist J W M Turner, *Fighting Temeraire*, which was on display at the Royal Academy in 1839 and given much press coverage at the time. If Sands wrote this with a view to appearing in public engagements, it would make sense to include his name in the narrative. Bonhams had also noted that Sands refers to other people's accounts of the battle of Trafalgar. This would perhaps fit with a manuscript prepared with thought and written for an audience: a sense of context and research having been done.

Robert Sands was discharged from HMS *Temeraire* on 18 January 1806 at Portsmouth.¹¹ He received prize money of £1 17s 8d for the capture of the enemy ships *Fougueux* and *Redoutable*. In addition, he was entitled to £4 12s 6d, a parliamentary award granted by the government for this famous historical victory. Nothing is known of his later life, beyond that he left the navy and wrote his unique account of the Battle of Trafalgar. As a 17-year-old boy with over £6 to his name, Robert Sands had ample opportunity to embark on another trade or occupation.

If you would like more background to the Battle of Trafalgar and a comparison of Robert Sands' manuscript to other accounts of HMS *Temeraire's* role in the action, please visit the current exhibition at Medway Archives Centre.



Edward Leonard Andrews; Commonwealth War Graves Commission gravestone in St Margaret's churchyard Rainham; copyright Medway Archives Centre.



Frank Stevens Broad; Commonwealth War Graves Commission gravestone in St James churchyard, Isle of Grain; copyright Medway Archives Centre.

Medway Remembers -

The Launch of a Major New WWII Project at the Medway Archives Centre

Helen Worthy, Medway Archives Centre Manager



2025 marks the 80th anniversaries of VE Day (Victory in Europe Day) on 8 May and VJ Day (Victory over Japan Day) on 15 August.

The team at Medway Archives Centre felt 2025 was the perfect time to launch our new volunteer project: *Medway Remembers*, with the 80th anniversaries in May and August of the end of the Second World War. Following on from FOMA's important work on their *De Caville Index* which lists those from Medway who perished during World War One (foma-lsc.org/wwi/), our new project aims to build a searchable database of civilians and military service personnel from Medway who lost their lives in World War Two. This research and a new microsite will preserve their stories for future generations and serves as a memorial to those who made the ultimate sacrifice. For the first time, the names and stories will be recorded in a single location, and will be freely available to families, local historians and anyone interested in Medway's people and stories.

We began the project by issuing a request for potential volunteers to come forward, and we were thrilled when over twenty local people contacted us to say they would like to be part of the project. We invited them all to an introductory session to learn more about *Medway Remembers*, and it was clear straight away that our wonderful volunteers brought with them a wealth of knowledge, research skills and enthusiasm.

Despite having to sit through a presentation covering vital topics such as health and safety, risk assessments, data protection and copyright, our volunteers appeared undaunted! We then shared our knowledge of the online resources available which will prove helpful to our volunteer researchers. After an all-important tea break together, our new volunteers had a chance to look at some of the resources we have here at Medway Archives Centre. As well as free access to *Findmypast*, *Ancestry* and the *British Newspaper Archive*, we have local newspapers and books on World War Two as well as archive documents recording local war memorials and the bombings in Medway - and much more.

Notes

1. *Bonhams catalogue*, 'Nelson and the Royal Navy 1750-1815', lot 169.
2. Information supplied by former archivist Stephen Dixon.
3. TNA, ADM36/15851, HMS *Temeraire* Muster Book, ADM35/2501, Pay books. Although he was technically discharged from HMS *Imperieuse* on 31 August 1803 and joined HMS *Temeraire* on 1 September 1803, this cannot in fact be true, as HMS *Imperieuse* was still at the Nore and did not get into Plymouth till 7 September.
4. Medway Archives Centre, RCA /02/19, Rochester Apprentice Register, TNA, IR39/50, Stamp Duty 1803.
5. Ken Blackmore, Robert Sands apprentice indenture, 21 December 1802-digital images supplied in 2024 before Ken's recent death. His son, Paul, will be donating these to Medway Archives.
6. Thanks to Brenda Paternoster, KFHS volunteer, for checking the family history angle. Kent Archives, P284/11/1-2, East Peckham Overseers Accounts.
7. This dating is two months earlier than that given in the Rochester apprentice register but is the date of commencement on the contract. It is likely that the record in the register was the date the clerk added the entry. TNA, Will of Ann Bartholomew, PROB11/1681/258; Medway Archives Centre, P150B/1/29, Strood St Nicholas Burial Register 1813-1837.
8. Ken Blackmore, Matthias Lock's Freedom of the River document. This is dated 1798, but the only entry in the Oyster Fisheries register of the Freedom of the River clearly shows 1791. Perhaps the document had to be reissued if he changed boats. The 'Blackmore documents' came down directly through the Lock family and were sold at auction at Amersham in 2017.
9. Medway Archives Centre, P150/1/9, Frindsbury Marriage Register 1793-1812; P85/1/81, Chatham St Mary's Burial Register, P85/1/25, Chatham St Mary's Burial Register 1820-1824; William Jefferys, *An Account of the Dreadful Fire at Chatham....1820*, (1821).
10. Medway Archives Centre, DE1010, Robert Sands Manuscript.
11. TNA, ADM/2501 HMS *Temeraire* Pay Book.

The Birth of FOMA

Amanda Thomas, Editor, *The Clock Tower*



The purchase in 2005 of the account by Robert Sands of the Battle of Trafalgar, and as described in the previous pages by Catharina Clement, was an important factor in the formation of the Friends of Medway Archives (FOMA), together with the launch of the online *Medway Ancestors* project, also known by some as *CityArk*. This is still one of the few online resources for historians to view *original* parish records. *The Clock Tower* launched with that cover story in the spring of 2006:

‘*Medway Ancestors* is Medway Council’s project to publish images of the original parish registers in its custody on the Medway Archives website, *CityArk* (cityark.medway.gov.uk), made possible by a grant of £49,500 by the Heritage Lottery Fund under the *Your Heritage* scheme. The registers are held on deposit from the local parish churches and cover the Rochester Archdeaconry area, extending from Dartford and Gravesend in the west to Rainham in the east, and focusing on the Medway Towns. *Medway Ancestors* is already proving to be a huge success with almost 33,000 researchers worldwide visiting the site between 14th December 2005 and 28th February 2006.’

FOMA and *The Clock Tower* were the vision of MAC’s then archivist, Stephen Dixon, who reported in the first issue:

‘The formation of the Friends has happened at an exciting stage in the development of the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre. We feel we have taken full advantage of digital technology and are ahead of our counterparts elsewhere in Kent and around the country. Work on *Medway Ancestors*, our parish registers’ imagebase has just been completed, making us the first office to publish parish registers online. Similarly, our local studies staff are in the final stages of applying for a Heritage Lottery Grant to publish their illustrations collection online. Medway is fortunate also in being the centre of the revived Victoria County History of Kent, and we are pleased our collections are the focus of the VCH team’s activities.’

In that same issue, members were greeted by the new Chairman, Roy Murrant (pictured) opposite who gave some background to the new group:

‘Back in October 2005 a meeting was held to discuss the formation of a



Friends of Medway Archives group, and after a lively discussion I was elected Chairman of the Steering Committee ... to look into its formation.

A lot of hard work by members of this committee has taken place over the past few months to put together a constitution and rules ..., which will be presented for your consideration at the inaugural General Meeting on 6th April 2006 ...

Our aim is to form a group of like-minded individuals dedicated to the preservation of our local heritage and promotion of the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre. We hope to be able to take this further in due course, with staging events such as talks, tours of archival interest, fund raising, and possible visits to schools to involve our children and grandchildren in the heritage of the Medway Towns.

I very much look forward to seeing you all at the meeting on 6th April.’

FOMA was formalised at that first AGM in April 2006. It is hard to believe that some 20 years have passed, and sad that many members, including Roy, are no longer with us. The Friends is a very different organisation to what it was back then and we are proud to be one of the longest standing groups of this type in Medway. Watch this space for future plans – and to the next 20 years!



Cutting the ribbon to launch Medway Ancestors (from left to right) is John Leigh Pemberton of the Heritage Lottery Fund Committee South East, Tessa Towner, Friends’ Vice Chairman, Patricia Salter, Friends’ Vice President, Roy Murrant, Friends’ Chairman, Cllr Sue Haydock, Medway Council, Stephen Dixon, Borough Archivist, and Brian Kingsley-Smith, Friends’ Vice President.