



**The FOMA AGM
and the
20th ANNIVERSARY OF FOMA**

**Friday, 10 April 2026,
Medway Archives Centre, Strood
5.00pm – 8.00pm**

AGM, 5.00pm

Details/paperwork will be available online on the FOMA website, www.foma-lsc.org.
If you require paper copies, please contact Elaine Gardner,
102 Valley View Road, Rochester, ME1 3NX, Kent; emgardner@virginmedia.com; 07733154004.

Apologies to the Membership Secretary, Natasha Boardman-Steer at
membership@foma-lsc.org (PLEASE REF. 'AGM')

AGM followed by

**20th Anniversary Event
6.00pm – 8.00pm**

Join us to celebrate!

**Entertainment, Raffle, Refreshments and Displays
and**

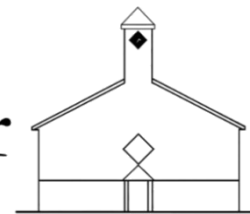
***The History of FOMA* exhibition**

Free to FOMA members!

**Please RSVP Natasha Boardman-Steer
membership@foma-lsc.org (PLEASE REF '20th EVENT')**

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

The Clock Tower



Issue Number 81: February 2026
£2.00; free to members

The Friends of Medway Archives
Excepted Charity registration number XR92894

The New Dickens Room



The new Dickens Room housing the Percy Fitzgerald Collection at the Medway Archives Centre was open to view at the Christmas Drop-in in December; see page 10.
Photograph, Alex Thomas.

ALSO INSIDE

The FOMA AGM 2026 and the FOMA 20th Anniversary Event!
SEE THE BACK PAGE FOR DETAILS.

AND

The story of Dale's greengrocer, Ernest Whiffing continues on page 14.

The New Dickens Room and the Percy Fitzgerald Collection

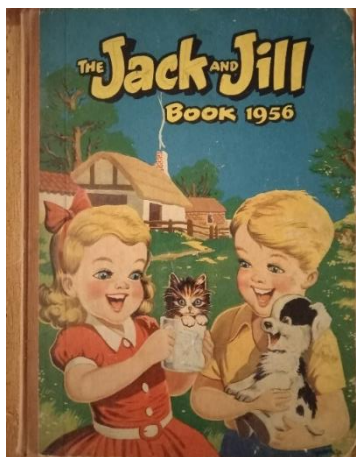
An image of the other end of the new Dickens study room housing the Percy Fitzgerald Collection. At the Christmas drop-in, tours were undertaken by Emma Ovenden and Local Studies and Archive Assistant, Daniel Godfrey. Photograph, Alex Thomas.



Right: Daniel Godfrey and Dr Alex Thomas looking at an exhibit from the Percy Fitzgerald Collection. No. 141, letters of Charles Dickens, Volume 1, a transcript of correspondence by Charles Dickens. Photograph, Amanda Thomas.



Comics



On page 36 Janet King takes a nostalgic look at the comics of yesteryear. One of her favourites was *Jack and Jill*, the 1956 annual which Janet still has (pictured).

Medway Archives Centre Christmas Drop-in

FOMA Interim Chairman, Cindy O'Halloran (pictured) ran the refreshment table with Elaine Gardner.



FOMA Membership Secretary, Natasha Boardman-Streer drums up new members!

The Committee

Patron

Vacant

President

Russell John Race, JP, DL



Vice Presidents

Stephen Dixon, Elaine Gardner, Sue Haydock

Interim Chairman

Cindy O'Halloran

cindy_ohalloran@hotmail.com

Vice Chairman

Vacant

Treasurer

Sally Ironmonger

treasurer@foma-lsc.org

Secretary

Vacant

Membership Secretary

Natasha Boardman-Steer

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Webmaster

Dr Alexander Thomas

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Members

Len Feist:

lfstrood@gmail.co.uk

Tony Gray

tonyatfoma@gmail.com

The Clock Tower Editor and Publicist

Amanda Thomas

editor@foma-lsc.org

Changes Afoot ...

In the last *Clock Tower*, we wrote of the changes to the FOMA Committee, and our appeal for new members did not go unheard. As this issue will go to press before the next committee meeting, and before the AGM has taken place, we are not yet able to reveal the new committee structure.



However, we are delighted to announce that FOMA member, and local resident Tony Gray (pictured) will be joining the team. Tony joined FOMA in 2018 and is a familiar face at the Medway Archives Centre. He was brought up in Rochester, though his late parents were from Strood, and he retired in 2021 after a career in the power industry. Tony is a regular contributor to *The Clock Tower* and his fascinating observations on the history of Rochester High Street have created a lot of discussion and interest. Tony will be a great addition to the FOMA committee.

We are also extremely pleased to announce that Stephen Dixon, our former Borough Archivist, has agreed to become a FOMA Vice President.



More details will follow in the next issue, but rest assured, plenty is happening behind the scenes and we would like to thank everyone who is contributing to our future success! If you would like to join us, please contact Amanda Thomas at editor@foma-lsc.org.

FOMA AGM 2026

and the

FOMA 20th Anniversary

See the back page for full details!

**PLEASE NOTE, APOLOGIES AND RSVPS ARE VITAL
FOR US TO KNOW NUMBERS PRIOR TO THIS
IMPORTANT EVENT**

**PLEASE CONTACT NATASHA BOARDMAN-STEER AT
MEMBERSHIP@FOMA-LSC.ORG
(REF. 'AGM' FOR APOLOGIES AND '20TH EVENT' FOR RSVPS)**

New Members

A warm welcome to new FOMA members Nigel Bushell, George Hornby, Paul Middleton, Andrew Warrilow, Lorraine White, Christine and Raymond Coward, Susan and Terry Hyland, and Hilary Blandford.

Subscription Renewal Reminder

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

(IF YOU JOINED AFTER 1 OCTOBER 2025, THIS DOES NOT APPLY)

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

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!

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 82 of *The Clock Tower* is Monday 27 April 2026, with publication on Wednesday 21 May 2026.

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 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@creatabot.co.uk

Medway Geographical and Local History Society

We now have a new venue!

Since September we have been 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!

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.

Obituary

Christopher J Nickless (1947 – 2025)

We were most saddened to hear of the death on 1 December of FOMA member, Christopher J. Nickless. We send our condolences to his family and to his wife, Mairi, who remains a member.

A King's School alumnus (1955-65), Christopher later taught at the school and was Headmaster of the Preparatory School from 1991 to 2001. Christopher was also a local councillor.

The funeral took place at Rochester Cathedral on 8 January and was attended by over 300 people. Christopher will be much missed by all those whose lives he touched, and as the King's School states, 'A man of many unique talents, Chris will be fondly remembered for his kindness and his unwavering support of the KSR community.

A full obituary can be read on the King's School website
<https://kings-rochester.co.uk/christopher-john-nickless-memories/>

Rita Gregory

It is with great sadness that we report the death of Rita Gregory, a FOMA member since 2012, and close friend of ex-committee member Betty Cole.

Rita often helped Betty out with refreshments during FOMA events, and her enthusiasm and wonderful cheerfulness were an inspiration to us all. Rita will be greatly missed, and we send condolences to her family and friends.

Medway Archives Centre Report

Sarah Trim-West, Archivist.



Hello y'all - Sarah again!

I will be taking a slightly different approach to Helen Worthy's usual update, in that I will be letting you know what we have been up to behind the scenes.

Changes to the Strong Room

If you remember from my last report, I mentioned that we were starting a MASSIVE project of rearranging the strong room, to make access easier and quicker, and hopefully requiring the use of our beloved Hugo lift less. With the help of a lovely young man from Strood Library, we have rearranged the Petty Session records, School records, the Watts Charity Archive, and are almost done doing ALL of the Parish Archives. This is about 51 bays worth of boxes. We still have much more work to do, but it appears the changes we have made so far are already helping the assistants with their retrievals. Which is the goal of the project.

Conservation News

We have conducted our staff training on preservation and how to spot potential preservation issues before they become a problem. It went well (aside from some hiding behind hands during the insect portion) and staff have already put their knowledge to use. We are looking to apply for some grants to allow us to send more items to the National Conservation Service (NCS) for cleaning and conservation. This applies in particular to some items that have come from damp environments and have developed mould as a result. While the mould is not a risk to the rest of the collection currently, we would like to nip the issue in the bud and not chance any risk to the rest of the collection.

Search Room Changes

Our new shelves have been installed! They hold the smaller volumes from the Percy Fitzgerald Collection and we hope to have the catalogue for the Percy Fitzgerald Collection (and others) up on CityArk soon. We have been unable to make changes to CityArk due to it having been migrated to a new system, but this should be complete soon. This has also been the reason for the intermittent outages that we had over the holidays, but hopefully those issues have been resolved.

- 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.



For the latest update:

https://files.chathamtraction.org.uk/updates/251206_Update_69.pdf

Still not there yet with GKE 68, but some heartening stuff nevertheless!

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

Friends of Broomhill

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



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

Lecture 6: *By Foot: where we walked and why paths are still important*

1 July 2026.

Join Norma Crowe for the last talk in this year's lecture series.

Maps reveal a network of routes crossing the land, some of which are hundreds of years old. Many of these are now metalled roads but alongside them are footpaths, tracks, and now long distance waymarked trails.

In this talk Norma looks at why and where some ancient tracks developed, and why they have survived. She also considers the growth of long distance paths which traverse our land including the Saxon Shore Way, the Ridgeway, and the coastal paths around England and Wales.

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.

Events

As always, the first Saturday of the month hosts our drop-in sessions. Please join us for our upcoming sessions. These sessions are free and there's no need to book, just drop in.

Our next display is to honour FOMA's 20th anniversary. This is a follow on to our Robert Sands display, as FOMA was created in order to purchase the Robert Sands manuscript. Please see the *News and Events* section for more details on these, on page 39.

Our MAC lecture series for 2026 is already sold out. Thank you to everyone who booked and thank you to all our wonderful speakers.

Please see the *News and Events* section on page 39 for more details on MAC events.

Donations

All donations to our collections undergo a period of quarantine. This enables me, Sarah, as 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 have received a large donation from the North Kent Methodist Circuit as a result of both their end of year clear out, and the closure of a church. These are some of our favourite donations to receive as they are very useful for family history researchers and for those looking to track notable people or places.

We also made a purchase of glass plate negatives from Gillingham. These are still in quarantine but once catalogued and digitised will show some wonderful images of events and people of Gillingham from the early 20th century.

General Overview

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.

As well as providing our public in-person service at the centre, this last three months we have also replied to almost 300 emailed enquiries and completed paid research for customers who cannot visit. Our Archive Assistants have also been involved in other work behind the scenes, including retrievals from the strongroom, preparing for events, creating social media posts, designing posters, repackaging and listing documents, and much more.

Partnerships and collaborative working are a fundamental part of our work at MAC. In October, Sarah and Alice Blake (Local Studies and Archive Assistant)

- represented MAC at Medway Matters Live at Mid-Kent College in Gillingham
- In October, Sarah and Nikki Pratt represented MAC at the Medway History Showcase at the Royal Engineers Museum.
- In November, Emma Ovenden and Helen Worthy represented MAC at the Medway Staff Roadshow
- And finally in December, we hosted our always popular Christmas event, where we sell stock we no longer require, give talks, and tours. See page 10.

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.

Volunteers

We have launched our next big volunteer project, researching Medway's war dead during World War Two.

This project will run through 2025/2026 to build a searchable database of civilians and service personnel from Medway who lost their lives in World War Two. This research will preserve their stories for future generations.

All volunteer slots have now been taken, but please keep an eye on our social media (Medway Archives Centre on Facebook) and newsletters for future calls for volunteers for this project.

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

During this significant period in English history, Medway was located on the margins of a divided land. It was both conquered and raided.

This lecture will trace the Viking Age in Medway - from its early Christian roots to devastating Viking raids, and the eventual unification of England. Discover how Medway was not simply a witness to history, but also played a central role in some of the most important events of the time.

Dr Alexander Thomas is an archaeological and historical researcher of Viking Age England. His forthcoming book with Routledge, 'The Danelaw in Viking Age England: The Distribution, Impact, and Duration of Danish Law', examines the historical and archaeological evidence for the Viking area of northeast England. Alexander is a member of the Rochester Cathedral Research Guild and the Kent Archaeology Society.

Lecture 3: *The Medway Prison Hulks*

8 April 2026

Join Keith Gulvin for the third talk in this year's lecture series.

Prison Hulks were a feature on the river Medway for over a century, holding prisoners of war and civil convicts awaiting transportation.

This talk explores the ships, the men, and the reasons why the Hulks were placed here.

Lecture 4: *Down Delce Way*

6 May 2026

Join Catharina Clement for the fourth talk in this year's lecture series.

The Delce area of Rochester has a rich and fascinating history.

Join Catharina to discover more about the area as she explores the streets of her childhood.

Lecture 5: *The Dockyard and Ship Repair at Sheerness*

3 June 2026

Join Martin Verrier for the fifth talk in this year's lecture series.

This talk looks briefly at the establishment of Sheerness Dockyard in the late 17th century, and John Rennie's rebuilding of the dockyard in the 1830s. The ship repair industry, which continued after the closure of the Royal Dockyard in 1960, saw many different river craft using its facilities.

An unexpected closure announcement was made in the spring of 1993 and, when the yard closed in September of the same year, 300 years of ship repair at Sheerness came to an end.

Mapping Medway

Saturday 4 April, 10am to 12noon

We love maps! Our Centre is home to an important collection of historical, contemporary and specialist maps that cover Medway and the surrounding area. Maps give us a wealth of information in a very visual way, and many are works of art in themselves.

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

MAC 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.

PLEASE NOTE

At the time of going to press, all lectures 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.

£4 for a single lecture or £20 for a season ticket to all 6 lectures. Lectures are from 2 to 3pm.

To book: email: archives@medway.gov.uk; telephone: 01634 332 714; drop-in to Medway Archives Centre.

Lecture 2: *Conquered, Raided and Divided: The Viking Age in Medway*
4 March 2026.

Join Dr Alexander Thomas for the second talk in this year's lecture series. An account dated AD793 in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles records the sacking of the monastery of Lindisfarne on Holy Island, Northumbria, by a raiding party of heathen men. England's Viking Age had begun!



The New Local Studies and Archive Assistants at MAC

You may have noticed some new faces if you have visited the Medway Archive Centre recently. Here Alice Blake and Daniel Godfrey introduce themselves.

Hello! My name is Alice Blake, as a Casual Archives and Local Studies Assistant here at MAC since July 2025, some of you might have seen me around. I can be found covering the desk, creating social media posts or behind the scenes in the strongroom. I have been a volunteer at Royal Engineers Museum's archive department for the past 9 months and am currently working towards taking a MA course in archives and records management. With a background in illustration and print, I have a keen interest in traditional printed media, social history and medieval art. I love meeting everyone so please do say hello if you see me around!

Hi! I am Daniel Godfrey and I am a relatively new member of the team, starting last summer as a Casual Archives and Local Studies Assistant. You will occasionally see me on the desk as well as around the Archive Centre performing various jobs. That may include finding material in our collection for a social media post, or helping to organise the vast contents of our archive. You will also likely see me at the various events that Medway Archives Centre will host throughout the year.

I have a background in history obtaining a degree while studying in Canterbury at the University of Kent so I would be thrilled with any conversation about the nooks and crannies of the subject that you might be interested in. If you frequent or visit the Chatham Historic Dockyard you are also likely to see me there as I am a member of the Visitor Experience Team and should have some extended information on its history and local significance. I'll be looking forward to greeting many of you throughout the year either when you come in to use our services or at our various events taking place.



Medway Archives Centre Christmas

Drop-in

Amanda Thomas, Editor, *The Clock Tower*



The annual Medway Archives Centre Christmas drop-in took place on Wednesday 3 December. We were delighted to see so many familiar faces, such as our lovely ex-committee member, Betty Cole, and a considerable number of new visitors as well, including volunteers for MAC's new World War Two project *Medway Remembers*. Sadly, however, our archivist, Sarah Trim-West was unable to attend as she was not well.

In anticipation of the possibility that many of those at the drop-in might not know about the Friends, we set up a special FOMA desk and display to explain how we support the archive - and also in the hope of recruiting some new members (see page 47). Manned by Natasha Boardman-Steer and Dr Alex Thomas, we gained quite a number of new members, but also had an opportunity to discuss many of the projects and interests others are involved in, and which could also be inspirational for events in 2026 and beyond.

The annual book sale was as popular as ever, and Cindy O'Halloran and Elaine Gardner served more teas, coffees and mince pies than ever before. Such was the demand for drinks that MAC's Helen Worthy, Alison Thomas and Catharina Clement were having to regularly race up and down the foyer to replenish the urns!

The biggest attraction at the drop-in was the new Dickens Room, as illustrated on the front cover and page 2. Emma Ovenden oversaw guided tours, ably assisted by Archives and Local Studies Assistant, Daniel Godfrey. The new room is well worth a visit, as it is absolutely fascinating and a fantastic new asset for the archive. Apart from the wealth of books now available to study, on display (and for these special tours) were of some of the interesting items which can be found in the ephemera folders.

Downstairs in the study area, there were also the usual interesting displays (see page 2). However, the loveliest thing, as always, about the Christmas drop-in was the opportunity to chat and to catch up, though this year, given the number of people milling around, that was really quite a task!

Medway Archives Centre

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

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.

Foyer Displays

Robert Sands: Powder Monkey

One of the treasures held at the Medway Archives Centre is a manuscript written by Robert Sands. It is 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.

The display runs from Monday, 10 November 2025 to Saturday, 14 March 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.

The History of FOMA

Our next display honours FOMA's 20th anniversary and will coincide with the special anniversary event (see the back page). This display will be in the foyer from March 16 to May 30. Available to view during our normal opening hours.

Saturday Drop ins

Medway's Women

Saturday 7 March, 10am to 12noon

Call in to discover more about women with a connection to Medway. Chat to staff and volunteers, and book a return visit to see more of the collection. It's free, there's no need to book, just drop in.

News and Events

Calendar of Forthcoming Events and Exhibitions

FOMA Talks and Events

The FOMA AGM

and the

20th ANNIVERSARY OF FOMA

Friday, 10 April 2026,

Medway Archives Centre, Strood

5.00pm – 8.00pm

SEE THE BACK PAGE FOR FULL DETAILS.

**PLEASE NOTE, APOLOGIES AND RSVPS ARE VITAL FOR US TO
KNOW NUMBERS PRIOR TO THIS IMPORTANT EVENT.
PLEASE CONTACT NATASHA BOARDMAN-STEER AT
MEMBERSHIP@FOMA-LSC.ORG**

(REF. 'AGM' FOR APOLOGIES AND '20TH EVENT' FOR RSVPS)

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.

20 Years of FOMA and the FOMA Exhibition

Amanda Thomas, Editor, *The Clock Tower*



I know many of you will remember the ten-year celebration we held for FOMA at the Copper Rivet Distillery, Chatham Dockside on 25 March 2017. Can you believe we are now about to celebrate our twentieth year since the founding of FOMA in 2006?!

Thanks to MAC's kind invitation, this time we have decided to hold an event at the archive itself, and we do hope that as many as you as possible will join us on 10th April. We will be holding the AGM prior to the celebratory event, and please do make sure you send RSVPS and any apologies with the reference 'AGM' and/or '20th Event' to our Membership Secretary, Natasha Boardman-Streer. That way we will know how many we need to cater for – please see the back page for full details.

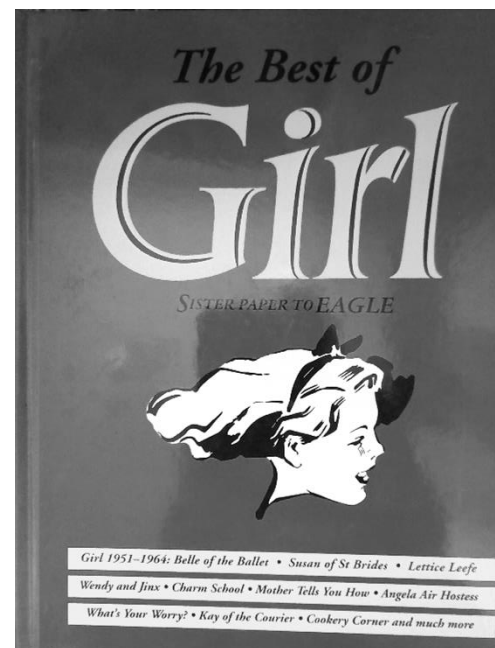
From 16 March, and to coincide with the anniversary event, FOMA will also be mounting an exhibition in the MAC foyer charting the evolution of our extraordinary organisation. FOMA began at the end of 2005 with the purchase of the Robert Sands document and the launch of *Medway Ancestors* (see the previous issue of *The Clock Tower*, number 80, November 2025), but our first AGM was in April 2006, and from then on we have gone from strength to strength. The exhibition will draw on our own archive, chronicled in *The Clock Tower*. It will cover the FOMA De Caville Index, projects such as *the Victoria County History's* England's Past For Everyone (EPE) programme, raising money at the London Marathon, and the wonderful series of exhibitions staged by Elaine Gardner, Tessa Towner, Odette Buchanan and Betty Cole to mark the centenary of World War One. Also featured will be the Live Bait Squadron, Isaac Newell, the Archives of Great Expectations project, the documents we have purchased for MAC – and the equipment - and the many historical mysteries we solved along the way. It has been quite a journey!

In the autumn, we did wonder if perhaps we might not be able to continue into our twentieth year, but we could not have been more wrong thanks to the support of the staff at the Medway Archives Centre and FOMA members who have rallied around to make sure we could continue our work supporting local heritage. Most poignant of all, has been the fantastic support we have received from Will Train, Medway's Library Service Manager. He was swift to point out to us that he believes we are the longest standing Friends organisation (for heritage, at least) in the Medway area. That is an achievement in itself and makes us even more determined to continue!



*Pictured at the Inaugural AGM in 2006 are:
Back row from the left, Russell Race (President), Tony Farnham, Dr Andrew Hann (Committee Member and Kent Team Leader for the Victoria County History's England's Past for Everyone), Brian Kingsley Smith (Vice-President).
Middle row, John Witheridge (Committee Member), Yolanda Dunn (Committee Member and Press Officer), Bob Ratcliffe (Committee Member), Norma Crowe, (Local Studies Librarian).
To the other side of the painting, David Carder (Committee Member), Stephen Dixon (Borough Archivist), Amanda Thomas (The Clock Tower Editor), Jean Skilling (Treasurer).
Front row; Councillor Sue Haydock (Vice President and Medway Council Representative), Roy Murrant (Chairman), Tessa Towner (Vice Chairman).*

Now for the serious bit. The original comics were printed for adults, the first being *The Comick*, which was published on 1 April 1786. Next came the caricature type magazine in 1808, followed by political satire the following year. The first cult cartoon figure was Dr. Syntax, promoting such products as hats, coats and wigs. In December 1831 *Figaro in London* appeared along with *Figaro in Liverpool* and *Figaro in Sheffield*. *Punch* came along in 1841. It bore the subtitle 'Charavari', which was inspired by, and a nod to, the French paper *Le Charavari*. As you can see, the history of comics is quite a serious one, considering they were meant to entertain. The first humorous comics, aimed at children, didn't come until much later, at the end of the nineteenth century.



One of Janet's Girl annuals.

Comics

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.

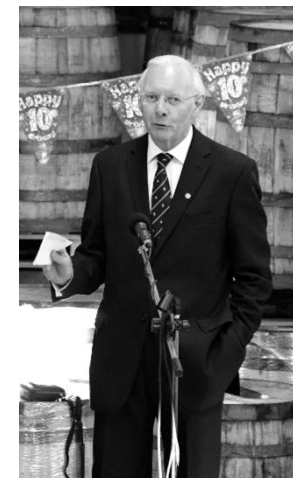
Our comics came from Petts, the newsagents, which was across the High Street in Chatham at the bottom of Institute Road, where we lived. On rainy 'stop at home' days, these comics gave some much needed boredom busting. Dad would take us down the hill, and we would choose one each from *Wizard and Chips*, *Buster*, *Bunty*, *Hotspur*, *Beano*, *The Dandy* and probably a few others that I can't remember. Years later I bought my son the *Beano* as he was a very serious child and I thought he really needed to flex his chuckle muscles. I'm sure that the character Ivy The Terrible was written with my mother-in-law in mind. Thinking of it, Minnie the Minx was probably based on me.

We, me and my brother John, had our main comics delivered weekly. I had *Jack and Jill*. I don't remember what John had, but he did like Harold Hare. This was like a large Bugs Bunny. Not only did we have our weekly fix, but we really enjoyed the annuals each Christmas. These provided hours of fun. I still have my *Jack and Jill* annual from 1957 and refer to it from time to time (see page 2). Where did you think I get all these articles from?! As I grew up, I had the magazine *Girl*. My favourite weekly was *Judy*, which at one time printed all the well-known stories from the ballets. I was very pleased as I was training to be Margot Fontaine at the time. My mum in her wisdom bought us the *Children's Newspaper*, which wasn't at all funny and, strangely, didn't get read very much. My husband Frank and his brother used to have *The Eagle* and *Hotspur*, which landed on British doormats in about 1953.

The Tenth Anniversary Celebrations in 2016



Tessa Towner (then Chairman) and Clock Tower Editor Amanda Thomas.



Right: FOMA President, Russell John Race, JP, DL



Left: Former archivist, Stephen Dixon.



'Right: Tongue in Cheek', Derek Moore (right) and Norman Brooks entertained us with sea shanties.

Photographs, David Thomas.

A Grocer's War

Sally and Phil Whiffing



The Whiffings are an old Medway family. Descendant, Phil Whiffing was born in Strood and grew up in Gravesend, but after leaving school, he moved away from the area to work in education. Recently retired, he enjoys photography, sailing and fishing. Sally, Phil's wife, has always been interested in local and family history and has worked in museums and archives around the country. She has researched her own roots in Cornwall and Staffordshire. However, after marrying Phil, she began to investigate his Kentish family history which goes back six generations in the Medway Towns. Sally has registered the Trethewey and Whiffing surnames with the Guild of One-name Studies, covering all the varied spellings of those names. Phil provides IT, editorial and logistical support for her research from their home in Dorset.

In the May 2025 edition of *The Clock Tower*, we told the story of Phil's grandfather's work in grocery shops in and around the Medway Towns during the early and mid-twentieth century. In that article we briefly referred to his service in the First World War: this article tells that part of his story.

When visiting his grandparents in the 1960s and 1970s, Phil remembers being shown over 50 postcards that his grandfather had brought back at the end of WW1. Two stood out in his memory, one of a large stone lion on top of a dam and one of a bridge laying in a river.

Eventually, these postcards came into our possession and the idea of identifying the locations and then visiting them developed. This led to an enjoyable holiday touring Belgium and part of Germany. While some of the subjects had been destroyed either in one of the two world wars or by more recent urban development, we were able to find and photograph the locations as they are 100 years later. In many cases, trees had grown, and new buildings have obscured the view and for one of them, while we were confident that we had found the correct woods, we could not be sure we were on the particular footpath shown on the postcard!

They had a daughter, Elizabeth, born in 1907, who became an opera singer and there are various notices of her performing around the country. In 1932 she married Herbert Reynolds Rowe, son of the late archdeacon of Rochester Cathedral, John Tetley Rowe. The marriage did not last long: Elizabeth petitioned for divorce in 1934 and, in 1936, she went on to marry her conductor, Michael Mudie (1914-1962). He was conductor of the well-known Carl Rosa Opera Company. In 1938 they had a baby girl, Mary, and in 1940, another child, Carole. This marriage didn't last either as, in 1944 Michael Mudie married another woman, Florence Melody Wolfe. Elizabeth Aveling died at Vines Cottage, Crow Lane, Rochester on 17 October 1982.

Notes

1. A copyrighted photograph of Claude Aveling can be found in the Royal College of Music Museum catalogue, ref.: LDRCM.Ph.5.44.
2. Member of the Victorian Order.
3. *Gentlewoman*, 25 April, 1903.
4. See also, *Cloistered Scandal, Robert Whiston and his Campaign against Cathedral Corruption*, Jon Bursey.
5. *Gentlewoman*, April 15, 1899.
6. *Kent Messenger*, 21 July, 1900.
7. *Gentlewoman*, March 3, 1903.

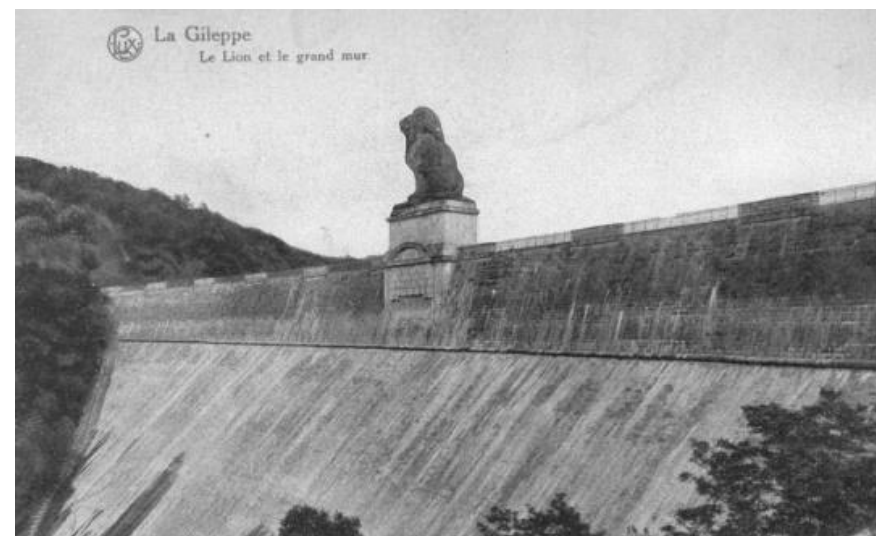
Dora Robins, Claude Aveling's future bride, was herself very musical and there are a handful of references to her prior to 1903. In June 1898 she wrote a hymn, *Grand Master Builder, Architect Divine*, for a special Masonic Service at Rochester Cathedral for Samuel Reynolds Hole (1819-1904). Hole, Dean of Rochester since 1887, was, in 1898, Grand Chaplain of the Masons and the service was to commemorate his year in office and his 56 years in masonry. According to the report, the great and the good were all there. Other references to Dora include playing the violin in the first concert of the season of the New Brompton Choral Society in November 1900; winning a Guildhall School of Music prize of a gold mounted violin bow (value £10) in 1901; and playing the violin at a Steinway Hall concert in December 1901.

Claude and Dora had ample opportunity in their musical community at Rochester to meet and get to know each other. One occasion was in July 1900 when a *Grand Fete* was held at Cobham Park. It was reported that the flowers were presided over by Mrs Stephen Aveling (mother of Claude) who was assisted by five ladies, including Miss Dora Robins. The *Kent Messenger* reported, 'Those gentlemen who had not got a buttonhole found it a difficult matter to resist the persuasive eloquence of the ladies who for the present posed as flower sellers.'⁶

A second occasion was in March 1903, just a few weeks before their marriage, when a story in the *Gentlewoman* reports that nine bachelors, including Claude Aveling, gave a dance for young ladies at the historic ballroom in the Bull Hotel Rochester. Apart from the two chaperones present, the young ladies included Miss [Sybil] Thorndike who had 'a pale blue silk sash tied in front of her skirt, and bodice made with hanging sleeves'; while Miss Dora Robins 'looked handsome in white satin with blue flowers on her corsage and in her hair.'⁷

Another reference to Mrs Claude Aveling is found in a small published volume called, *St Luke's church, New Brompton: Book of Memories* (1906) where those who had contributed to the building of the new church were invited to provide a quote from literature. Dora's entry is for April 16th and is a quote from the poet William Cowper: 'Thus music must needs be confessed / to flow from a fountain above; Else how should it work in the breast / unchangeable friendship and love?' Claude also contributed and his entry is dated September 23rd where he quotes Tennyson: 'No life that breathes with human breath / Has ever truly longed for death.'

After the First World War, Claude Aveling continued to be musically creative. The RCM Library catalogue has 58 items listed against his name. He continued with his official duties as Registrar until he retired in 1935. After living in Kensington for many years, he and his wife appear to have moved back to Rochester in the late 1930s where he died in 1943. His wife Dora died in 1961.



Two of the postcards.

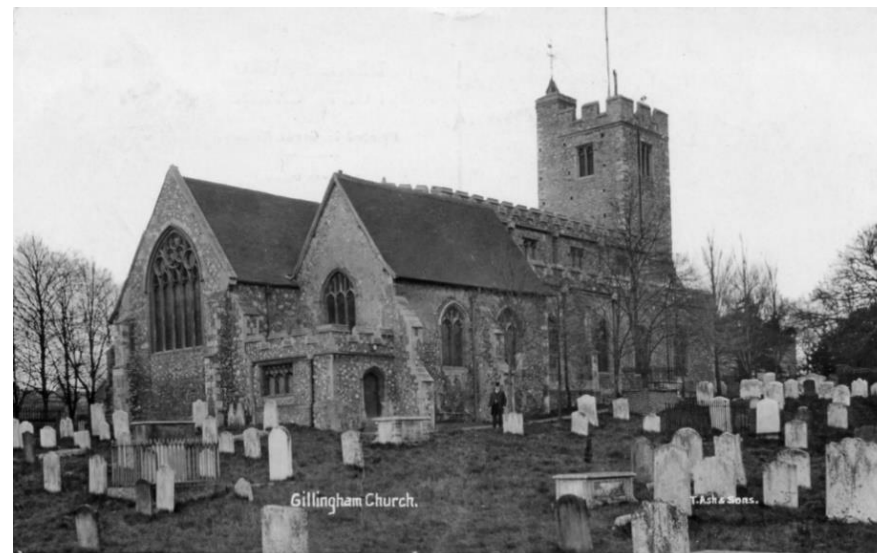
After this trip, we undertook more research into Phil's grandfather's service of which he never spoke. Some information was found among the 'burnt documents'¹ and we are grateful to The Royal Artillery Historic Trust for access to war diaries and their help with various military terms which we came across. This research led to another tour of Belgium and northern France following Phil's grandfather's route between battlefields.

Charles Albert Ernest Whiffing (Ernest) was born at 38 North Street, Strood on 13 January 1895, the second child of Charles Albert Whiffing and Mary Maria, née Hassam. His father died when Ernest was seven years old, he was one of five children so life would not have been easy. The 1911 Census shows him living with his paternal grandparents at 58 Gordon Road, Strood and working as a milk carrier. Our next records of him are his attestation papers dated 9 December 1915 found in the burnt documents.

From these we know that he was now living with his mother at 1 South Eastern Road, Strood and that he was a grocer. He attested in Chatham and entered the Royal Garrison Artillery (RGA) with the regimental number 130925. On the same day he received a medical examination in Rochester. His height is given as five feet seven inches and weight 119 pounds. His fully expanded chest is given as 37 and a half inches with an expansion range of two inches. He had four vaccination marks on his left arm. His vision was poor, recorded as 6 over 24 in both eyes, although noted as 6 over 6 with glasses. He was also identified as suffering from tachycardia² but was still declared, 'B1 fit for service in the field.'

Having attested, Ernest returned to his work for nearly a year until he was called up on 27 November 1916. During these eleven months, the battles of Verdun and the Somme had taken place and at home conscription had been introduced. Ernest was first posted as Gunner to an RGA depot, although which depot this was is not clear on the surviving burnt document, but it was probably at Derby. After a couple of weeks there he was sent to the Heavy Depot which was in Catterick. From here he was posted on 15 February 1917 to 2/1st Highland (Fife) Heavy Battery, a territorial unit. The location of this posting is not known, but wherever it was, Ernest had probably never left the Medway towns before and was about to travel farther still.

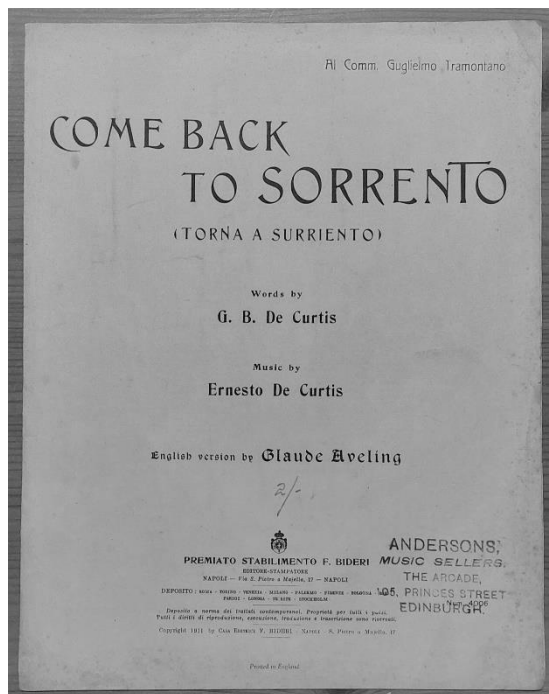
The burnt documents record that, five months later, on 24 July 1917, Ernest was posted again, this time to the 1st Reserve Brigade Heavy Artillery at Winchester in the 4th Reserve Battery. He is noted as being at the Heavy Artillery Training Centre on 11 August, returning to the 4th Reserve Battery on 24 August. On 11 September 1917, after nine months training, Ernest was posted to the RGA Base Depot, in Le Havre, France, and six days later, he was assigned to 131 Heavy Battery.



St Mary's church Gillingham where W H Robins (1847-1923) served for many years as vicar. Author's collection.



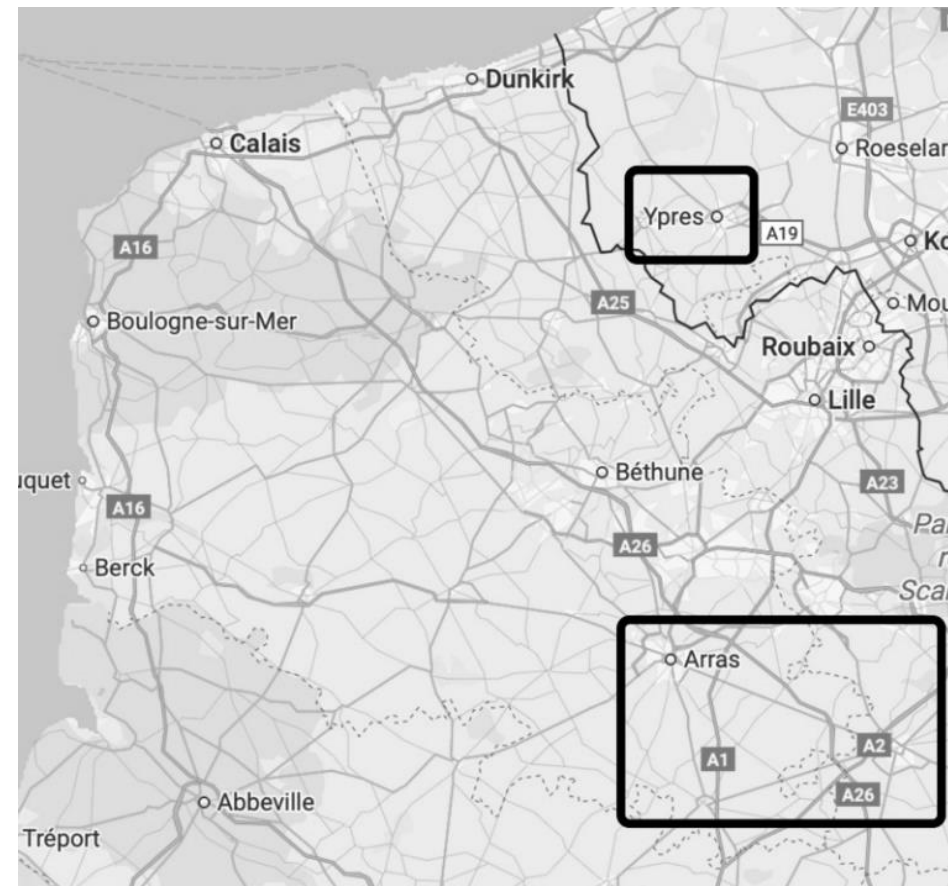
Another view of the church together with the vicarage where, presumably, Claude Aveling took tea with Dora and her family. Author's collection.



The cover of the sheet music for the well known Come Back to Sorrento with English translation by Claude Aveling, 1911. Author's collection.

Aveling was Secretary, and later Registrar, at the Royal College of Music for 41 years, serving under three directors: Sir George Grove, Sir Hubert Parry, and Sir Hugh Allen. He was very well known in London cultural circles but his own musical interests lay in writing librettos for light operettas, and translating into English lyrics of continental music both popular and classical. His published translations included *The Jewels of the Madonna* (1911), as well as well-known classical choral pieces such as *St Matthew's Passion* in 1908. He was also a lyricist and Aveling is credited with writing the words to popular songs of the day from plays such as *Girl from Kays*, *Susanna's Secret*, and *Lakme*. He also wrote English versions of Neapolitan songs such as *Santa Lucia* and *Come back to Sorrento*, and readers can hear Josef Locke singing the latter on YouTube. Second-hand copies of sheet music for these can also be bought on the internet.

How popular his versions were, it is difficult to say, as other versions or translations seem to be more widespread. He lived in London but remained part of the Rochester cultural scene and is reported in 1899 as having a role in the amateur production of *Jedediah the Scarecrow* at the Victoria Hall Rochester. Mrs Thorndike, wife of the vicar of St Margaret's organised the entertainment and presided at the piano. Claude Aveling was stage manager, and acted the part of *Dummy*, while Miss Sybil Thorndike played the part of Amy Block.⁵



Heavy Batteries were most often employed in destroying or neutralising the enemy artillery, as well as putting destructive fire down on strongpoints, dumps, stores, roads and railways behind enemy lines. When 131 Heavy Battery arrived in France in March 1916 it had four guns and two more were added in August of that year. At that time the battery consisted of 211 men inclusive of 8 Officers and 10 Sergeants.

Ernest joined 131 Heavy Battery when it was in the middle of the third battle of Ypres which ended with the capture of the strategic Passchendaele Ridge. Allied losses were over 300,000 and German losses were estimated at up to 260,000. Fifty-nine Victoria Crosses were awarded during this battle which took place in atrocious conditions of rain and mud. Ernest was a long way from Dale's grocery counter in Rochester.

Our family have several watercolours which Ernest painted in the 1920s and 1930s. When we followed the route taken by his battery, we learnt that another more famous watercolour painter was present at this battle, a certain Corporal Adolph Hitler, who drew several scenes at the time.

On 12 October 1917, the battery was relieved and moved south in preparation for the Battle of Cambrai which began on 20 November 1917. Usually remembered for being the first mass attack by tanks, Cambrai was also notable for new artillery techniques which did not require ranging shots, so the Germans were not alerted to the bombardment from over 1,000 guns before it started. The battle ended on 6 December after early British gains were lost at the cost of an estimated 40,000 casualties on each side.

Over the winter of 1917/18 Ernest’s battery was operating in the area between Arras and Bapaume, firing at targets from various locations. During this time the Germans had signed an armistice with Russia and were massing for a major strike in France. Early in March the war diary records engaging the enemy daily from the Mory-Ecost Road. Then on 21 March 1918, the Germans launched the *Kaiserschlacht* or Spring Offensive along a 50-mile front south of Arras, beginning with a bombardment from 6,000 guns with thick fog concealing the storm troopers. The diary records, ‘Position attacked 9.15am. 20 casualties including 4 killed.’ By 10am the battery received the instructions, ‘prepare to engage enemy at close quarters’ and at 4:15pm it records, ‘Pulled out under heavy shell fire without casualties either horse or man.’

The battery retreated to Hamelincourt and began firing again on 23 March. However, the next day at 11am the battery was ordered ‘to stand by ready to move’ with ‘enemy fire directed on railway in front of position, gradually extending to battery.’ By 4pm the diary records, ‘Teams ordered up and guns moved out under heavy fire. ‘B’ sub gun overturned but was secured by Lt Longhurst and the gun crew and fitters at 11pm.’ The next position recorded in the war diary was at Adinfer, seven miles further west from where they began to fire again until ordered to pull out on 27 March at 4pm. By 1am the next day the battery was pulled into position at Wailly about 6km to the north of Adinfer and 6km south-west of the centre of Arras. From this position the battery was ‘harassing by day and night at regular intervals carried on, on roads, railway and hutments each day until 21 April.’

It was while the battery was at Wailly that Ernest blotted his copy book. On 11 April he was awarded five days’ *field punishment number 2* for ‘being found away from billet at 12 M.N’ the previous night. This punishment may have required him to be shackled for up to two hours a day (see below), and in the words on Section 44 of the Army Act, ‘subjected to the like labour, employment, and restraint, and dealt with in like manner as if he were under a sentence of imprisonment with hard labour.’

W. P. Collett & Son, Ltd., Printers, Old Bailey.
[1338] W1420/211720 400/tn 5/170-4 127 85

Form
E. 12
34

REGIMENTAL CONDUCT SHEET.

Army Form B

Number of sheets)
(in words) } *First*
Signature of C.O. }
or Adjutant }

Regimental Number) *130925 Whiffing B.* Attested *9-12-1915* Joined *27-11-1916*

Place Date of Offence Rank Punishment awarded Names of Witnesses By whom

<i>Lt Col Field</i>	<i>10-11-15</i>	<i>1st Lt</i>	<i>Found away from his</i>	<i>Reg Comd</i>	<i>5 days 7P No 2</i>	<i>11-12-15</i>	<i>Major W.P. Phillips RGA</i>	<i>Ed</i>
<i>121 H.B.</i>			<i>Billet at 12 M.N.</i>					



From the age of six, Frederick Bridge (1844-1924) lived in Rochester after his father obtained the post of vicar-choral at the cathedral in 1850. He attended Rochester Cathedral School (now the King’s School) when the well-known Robert Whiston⁴ was headmaster and, in 1852, was allowed to toll the cathedral bell to mark the death of the Duke of Wellington. After finishing his studies, Bridge became the organist at Manchester Cathedral for six years after which, in 1875, he was appointed organist at Westminster Abbey where he remained for 43 years. He played the organ at many great state occasions including Queen Victoria’s 1887 jubilee, the coronation of Edward VII in 1902 and George V’s coronation in 1911. He was so well known that he appeared on a 1914 Wills’s cigarette card set of Musical Celebrities (although that was in series two and not series one). It would have been his friendship with the groom, Claude Aveling, that brought him to Gillingham

In 1882, Aveling, also a Rochester Cathedral School scholar, applied for and entered Westminster School aged 13 where he remained for five years before going on to Christ Church College Oxford. Whilst at the school, and for many years afterwards, Aveling was a chorister at the cathedral and must have had regular, probably weekly, contact with Frederick Bridge for over twenty years by the time of his wedding to Dora.

A Celebrity Organist Visits Gillingham: Sir Frederick Bridge

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 April 1903 Claude L C Aveling (1869-1943)¹, of the well-known Rochester family, married Marguerite Mary Theodora Robins (1878-1961), known as Dora, daughter of the vicar of Gillingham parish church, the Rev. W H Robins. The star attraction (apart from the bride) may have been Sir Frederick Bridge MVO², organist at Westminster Abbey, who attended and played the wedding march for them.³



Left, and opposite: Sir Frederick Bridge, Westminster Abbey organist, composer, and professor and lecturer at the Royal College of Music, Gresham College, and the University of London; author's collection.

There are two elements of this incident that illustrate the extreme circumstances of the time. First, the severity of the punishment and second that Ernest, who Phil only ever knew as a sober and strait-laced shopkeeper with a Victorian outlook, would have put himself in a position to incur it. Coincidentally, our visit to Wailly was on 11 April so Phil was tempted to seek out an opportunity for mischief, but the village was deserted, and the only bar was closed. We contented ourselves with a walk around the village and a photograph of the town hall and church. However, we may have crept over the speed limit as we left.

The German offensive ended on 25 April 1918 with extensive gains south of Arras, although the target of Amiens was not taken. Ernest's battery was firing daily from Wailly until 16 June when it was pulled out to 'proceed on rest'. It marched all night arriving just over 20km away at Grenas the next day. While at Grenas the battery was occupied by parades and drills, although it was noted that from 20 to 27 June 1918, '88 men were sick with influenza.'

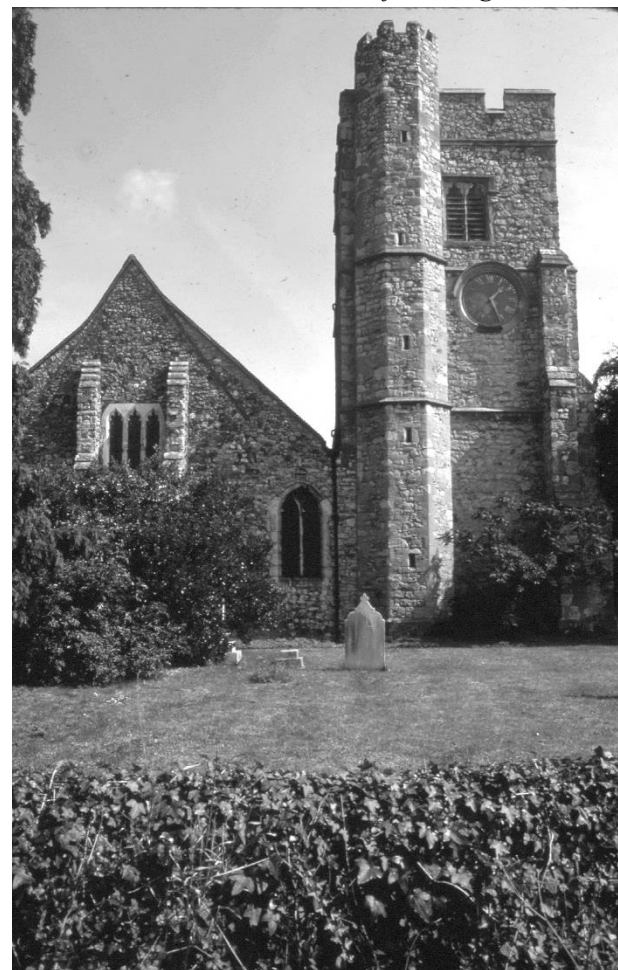
On 28 June 1918, the battery headed north to support another British attack at Ypres, opening fire on 14 July. Other than recording the return from hospital of Major Phillips, the officer who issued Ernest's punishment in Wailly, there are no further entries in the war diary. The burnt documents, however, record Ernest as being given leave to the UK via Calais on 1 October 1918. A family story is that Ernest was so lice-ridden when he returned home on leave, he was made to strip and wash outside before being allowed in the house.

Ernest rejoined his battery on 15 October 1918 as rapid advances were being made. One of the postcards is dated 11 November 1918, and shows the church in Tieghem, a village about 25 miles east of Ypres. Ernest had clearly been in the area for some days as the only other dated postcard in the collection is labelled 5 November 1918 and also shows a view of Tieghem. It looks very similar today (see overleaf).



The church in Tieghem, 1918 (above) and today.

We are also fortunate that Phelps wrote three notebooks which have survived and the full text can be seen on-line at <https://snodlandhistory.org.uk> under Pamphlets/H D Phelps 24 to 26. Pages 22-26 have a remarkable list of trees, birds, animals and insects which Phelps recorded and it was not until 1893 that Rev. C. H. Fielding attempted his own comprehensive list of 'A Fauna and Flora of Kent' in his *Memories of Malling and its Valley*.



All Saints Church, Birling.

Image from the author's collection.

Notes

1. Esmé Wingfield-Stratford, *This was a Man* The biography of the Honourable Edward Vesey Bligh, Diplomat-Parson-Squire (London, 1949).

The old Rector of Snodland was a positive curiosity - quite an old fossil, an antique Bachelor, who lived in two small rooms of his Rectory tended by a beaming Housekeeper called 'Kitty'. W. Phelps - that was his name - was nearly 80 years of age, a very short man, dressed always in a long tailcoat down nearly to the ankles, with an old-fashioned white choker round and round his neck and a 'Mother Gamp' large umbrella. On Sundays he wore his University gown, which he had had at Oxford or Cambridge 50 years ago, and which from black to brown had lapsed into a dingy floor colour: he always marched down the Village on his way to Church and back again in this manner. I must here relate one very odd story which he himself told me. He was a great foe to Smugglers, of whom in the old times there were many, and he had taken a somewhat leading part against them. Now Mr. Phelps was in the habit of walking one day in the week across the Medway via Wouldham to Rochester and back again - a walk of many miles. Very likely he may have been known to go to his Bankers [sic] on such a day, but at any rate he was a marked man, as the sequel will show. Fortunately for Mr. Phelps - unfortunately for another individual, a certain Tailor in Rochester, also a diminutive man of small physique - the latter took it into his head to walk towards Snodland through some woods where the path lay; and coming along unwittingly was pounced upon by one or more of the "Smuggler" party and cruelly murdered then and there - by mistake of course, but a very convenient one for Mr. Phelps, who had that day left Rochester somewhat later on his return walk to Snodland. Suspicion appears to have fallen upon the right party, and at the Coroner's inquest on the Tailor which was held at Cuxton, Mr. Phelps was chosen foreman - his would-be murderer being also present under arrest, and the two facing one another. I recollect how the old gentleman related to me his own feelings at the time under such extraordinary circumstances, knowing well he was himself the "*corpus*" intended, over which the inquest was being held. It was satisfactory, however, that the murderer was so promptly brought to justice and in due course duly hanged. On quarter days, when my stipend of £25 was due, the old gentleman would triumphantly march up the village to our house and put the money down in hard cash or otherwise, and good-naturely dispose of his debt for my humble services as if I was the biggest 'dun' or 'Old Clothier' London Jew craving for a prompt settlement! He also solemnly confused me when I first took up duty (no reflection of course on the services which I preached subsequently) as to the proper length for such discourses, using the phrase (as I well remember and also to my astonishment) "Twelve minutes is long enough for any *Monkey* to be talking to a lot of others". Peculiar indeed and hardly encouraging exhortation to a newly ordained Deacon. Old Phelps was a character, and the oldest clergyman in the diocese."



The east to west route of the retreating Germans revealed by the chronology of Ernest's postcards.

The terms of the armistice gave the German troops 15 days to leave Belgium and made provision for the Rhineland to be occupied by allied forces. Ernest found himself part of the force which followed the retreating Germans through Belgium and on to Cologne. The locations of his postcards show the route which he followed, as illustrated above.



Charles Albert Ernest Whiffing (Ernest).

The day after the British army crossed into Germany on 3 December 1918, Ernest was awarded 6d per day proficiency pay; there is no known connection between these two events! His final demobilisation papers give his military qualification as 'Gunner Cook'. In the photograph taken of him (on page 21) taken in Opladen near Cologne in 1919, a small badge can be detected just above his right cuff which indicates a specialist role. On 19 April 1919 Ernest signed his 'Statement as to Disability' in Opladen, though he claimed none, before being posted to the Dover Dispersal Centre. His demobilisation papers are dated 23 April 1919.

As well as leading to two interesting holidays, this research has given Phil a more sympathetic view of his grandfather's character and greater respect for him. Phil was also delighted to see that the lion still lives at the top of the rebuilt dam at La Gileppe and that the bridge at Liege has been replaced, and as can be seen in our photographs.



The dam at La Gileppe.

Montfaucon's *Antiquities*, 5 vols., [Bernard de Montfauçon, *A collection of ecclesiastical antiquities of France*, 1850]

Ingram's *Memorials of Oxford*, [James Ingram, *Memorials of Oxford*, 1837]

Gray's *Poems*, [Thomas Gray, *The Works of Thomas Gray, containing his Poems and correspondence ...* 1807 (3rd edn.)]

Lewis's *Rivers*, [Meriwether Lewis, *History of the expedition under the Command of Captains Lewis and Clark ... performed in the years 1804-5-6.*, 1814]

Beauties of the Court of Charles 2nd, [Anna Jameson, *Memoirs of the beauties of the Court of Charles the Second*, 1838]

Harris's *Aurelian*, [Moses Harris: *The Aurelian*, a natural history of English moths and butterflies, 1840]

Skelton's *Oxonia Antiqua Restaurata*, 2 vols., [Joseph Skelton, *Oxonia Antiqua Restaurata*, 1823]

Merrick *Ancient Arms and Armour*, [John Hewitt, *Ancient Arms and Armour*, 1855]

Drury's *Insects*, [Dru Drury, *Illustrations of Natural History; wherein are Exhibited upwards of two hundred and forty figures of exotic insects*, 3 vols, 1770-82]

and many other valuable works.

The out-door Effects will include 3 excellent full milch well-bred cows, 2 store pigs, quantity of poultry, stack of capital meadow hay, 4-wheel phaeton, dung cart, quantity of manure, dairy and brewing utensils, wheelbarrow, ladder, hand glasses, quantity of garden tools, and other effects.

The effects may be viewed on Monday, September 4th.

Catalogues may be had at 6d. each, at the Queen's Head, Maidstone; at the place of sale; and of the Auctioneer and Valuer, West Malling.

Israel Dutt (1815-1879) is listed as an auctioneer and appraiser in West Malling directories, first in Swan Street and then in the High Street. His selection of titles for the advertisement indicates he chose carefully in order to spark the interest of prospective buyers. Two particular groups of books are apparent. The first is of works involving architecture and history, beginning with three books particularly associated with Kent; one or two later ones perhaps reflect his time at Oxford. Especially striking are the numerous books about natural history and birds. We know very little about Phelps's interests, but he was a member both of the Maidstone Horticultural Society and Rochester and Chatham Horticultural Society, the latter founded in 1839. He was also a member of the British Archaeological Association after it was formed in 1843. Some books listed by Dutt are predominantly illustrations or prints.

No picture or photograph of Phelps is known, and even the site of his grave is unknown and unmarked, but we do have a vivid recollection of him in old age by Edward Vesey Bligh, briefly his curate in 1855-6.¹

Rocque's Survey round London, 1748, plates, [John Rocque, *An Exact Survey of the City's of London, Westminster, Ye Borough of Southwark, and the Country Near Ten Miles Around*, 1746]

Cotman's Architectural Antiquities of Normandy, [John Sell Cotman, *Architectural Antiquities of Normandy*, 1822]

Hofland's [sic.] White Knights, [Barbara Hofland, *A Descriptive Account of the House and Gardens called White-Knights*, 1819]

Britannia Illustrated, [(William) Camden's. *Britannia Illustrated with Plates*, 1753]

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The bridge at Liege.

Notes

1. In September 1940, as the result of a fire caused by an incendiary bomb at the War Office Record Store in Arnside Street, London, approximately two thirds of 6.5 million soldiers' documents for the First World War were destroyed. Those records which survived were mostly charred or water damaged and unfit for consultation and became known as the *burnt documents*.

2. Tachycardia is a heart rate exceeding 100 beats per minute at rest which can cause palpitations, dizziness, and shortness of breath. (Google)

Illustrations from the authors' collection.

Henry Dampier Phelps (1777-1865): A Remarkable Rector of Snodland

Dr. Andrew Ashbee

Dr Andrew Ashbee was born and bred in Snodland. The former Head of Music at Rochester Grammar School for Girls, Dr Ashbee is internationally known for his work on Tudor and Stuart music and musicians, especially the Maidstone composer John Jenkins. He is the Secretary and Honorary Curator of Snodland Millennium Museum and was formerly Chairman of Snodland Historical Society.



Henry Dampier Phelps (1777-1865) was Rector of Snodland for sixty-one years between 1804 and his death in 1865. Born at Sherborne in Dorset, he was himself the son of a clergyman, Rev. Thomas Phelps (1740-1811), vicar of Haddenham, Buckinghamshire, and of his wife Elizabeth Dampier (1739-1825). Henry went up to Hertford College in the University of Oxford on 18 May 1795, graduating four years later and achieving his M.A. in 1801. In 1799, the year of his graduation, he took Holy Orders and went to Haddenham as curate to his father. His uncle, Thomas Dampier, was already Dean of Rochester, but was elevated to Bishop of the See in 1802. As Dean he had been able to put his brother-in-law into the vicarage at Haddenham; now, as Bishop, he appointed Henry to be Rector of Snodland, where the living was worth £300 a year. Henry was inducted on 3 July 1804, staying for the rest of his long life, unmarried, but with two nephews nearby playing their part in the cure of souls: Henry Dampier Phelps (1811-1864), Vicar of Birling, and Thomas Prankerd Phelps (1814-1903), Rector of Ridley. The latter clergyman (and the family background) are the subject of a fine book by Gerald van Loo, *A Victorian Parson: The Life and Times of Thomas Prankerd Phelps, Ridley, Kent. Rector, 1840-1893* (Upton-upon-Severn, 1989).

Phelps died on 30 July 1865, aged 88, and his estate was auctioned on 5 and 6 September that year. Advertisements of the auction appeared in local newspapers during August and September, but most unusually these included a list of 40 to 50 books from his substantial library of 'about 2,500 volumes'. It is a fascinating list and there is sufficient information to work out the authors and titles of most of them and these are listed within [] brackets below.

Mr. I. Dutt has been favoured with instructions to sell by auction, on Tuesday, September 5th, 1865, and following day, at Eleven o'clock each day, on the above premises, the property of the late Rev. H. D. Phelps.

The whole of the HOUSEHOLD FURNITURE, including four-post and other bedsteads and furnitures, capital goose-feather bed, hair and wool mattresses, prime Witney blankets, several mahogany chests of drawers, washstands and tables, cheval and dressing glasses, mahogany telescope dining and other tables, antique oak dresser, Brussels carpets, fenders and fire irons, mahogany wardrobe, china, glass and earthenware, several engravings, 2 paintings, small quantity of linen, capital iron chest, several mahogany bookcases, &c.

A valuable LIBRARY of about 2,500 volumes, including many rare and valuable works, amongst which will be found

Harris's Kent, [John Harris, *The History of Kent*, 1719]

Philipot's Kent, [Thomas Philipott, *Villare Cantianum; Or, Kent Surveyed and Illustrated*, 1659]

Thorpe's Registrum Roffense, [John Thorpe, *Registrum Roffense*, 1769]

Suckling's Antiquities of Essex, [Rev. Alfred Inigo Suckling, *Memorials of the Antiquities and Architecture, Family History and Heraldry of Essex*, 1845]

Winkle's British Cathedrals, [Henry and Benjamin Winkles, *Winkles's Architectural and Picturesque Illustrations of the Cathedral Churches of England and Wales*, 1836-1842]

Gould's Birds of Europe, 5 vols. Folio, beautifully illustrated, [John Gould, *The Birds of Europe*, 1837]

Gould's Family of Toucans, [John Gould, *Monograph of the Ramphastiae or Family of Toucans*, 1852-4]

Gould's Birds of Himalaya Mountains, [John Gould, *A Century of Birds from the Himalaya Mountains*, 2 vols., 1831-2]

Cuitt's Wanderings and Pencillings amongst the Ruins of Olden Times [George Cuitt, *Wanderings and Pencillings amongst the Ruins of Olden Times*, 1848]

Hakewell's Picturesque Tour of Italy, [James Hakewell, *A Picturesque Tour of Italy*, 1820]

Roman Antiquities of Northamptonshire, [(John Bridges) *The History and Antiquities of Northamptonshire. Compiled from the manuscript collections of the late learned antiquary John Bridges, Esq, By the late Peter Whalley*, 1791]

Wild's Worcester Cathedral, [Charles Wild, *An Illustration of the Architecture and Sculpture of the Cathedral Church of Worcester*, 1823]

the Antiquities of Sefton Church [Liverpool], [Richard Bridges, *The Antiquities of Sefton Church*, 1835]

Cook's view of the Old and New London Bridges, [Edward William Cooke, *View of the Old and New London Bridges*, 1833]