

Working for You!

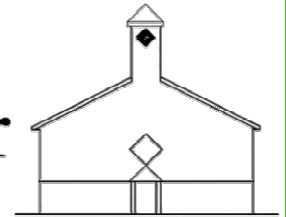


FOMA Committee members Tessa Towner (Chairman), Jean Skilling (Treasurer), Betty Cole (Membership Secretary) and Elaine Gardner (Vice Chairman and Events Co-ordinator) make a start on the Christmas 2012 issue of *The Clock Tower*, stuffing them into labelled plastic bags, ready for posting to FOMA members.

If undelivered, please return to:

*Medway Archives office,
Civic Centre, Strood, Rochester, Kent,
ME2 4AU.*

The Clock Tower



Issue Number 29: February 2013
£2.00; free to members

Sixty Years Ago



Brian Joyce looks back at the 1953 floods

The Kent Oil Refinery, Isle of Grain.
Photograph kindly supplied by Norma Crowe, MALSC Local Studies Librarian;
from the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre collections,
photograph donated by the Kent River Board. **See page 28**

The Volunteer Morning at MALSC



The annual Volunteer Morning was held at MALSC on Wednesday 21 November 2012, led by Local Studies Librarian and FOMA member, Norma Crowe (left). Pictured right is Gwynne Grant, Community Librarian for Medway Libraries, the morning's guest speaker. Volunteers gather and await the morning's proceedings.



PLEASE REMEMBER THAT THE ONLINE VERSION OF THE CLOCK TOWER (WWW.FOMA-LSC.ORG/NEWSLETTER.HTML) HAS LARGER TYPE AND PHOTOGRAPHS; ONLINE EDITIONS ALSO INCLUDE ADDITIONAL ILLUSTRATIONS.



World's End or Jenkins' Dale in Chatham surrounded by fields, circa 1860s. The chalk workings and limekilns are clearly visible and beyond the little group of cottages Chalk Pit Hill can be seen with a house and barns cresting the hill.

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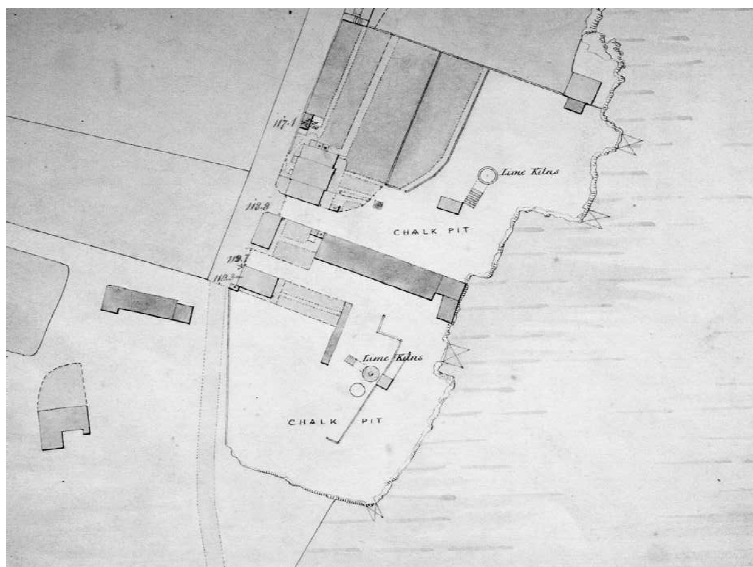
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to determine whether the tunnel on the left hand side of the picture is the railway tunnel or the chalk working tunnels shown on the 1856 Board of Health map (reproduced here). The Board of Health map shows this area depicted by the artist with the workings and the chalk pit. The 1842 Tithe Map of Jenkins' Dale shows the centre building and works in the possession of Richard Austin. The World's End Pub which stood in this area was owned by William Henry Austin, presumably a member of this same family, and a trade directory of 1867 shows that he was here as a beer seller.

Who lived in the curious house with the Grecian urns and lace curtains? It looks rather upmarket! The large barn to the right of the picture is part of the Warner family's house and farm also shown on the 1842 Tithe Map series.

I find this naive little watercolour quite touching in a way that a photograph could never be. The artist signs himself as R. Butler. Who was he, did he live and work here? Did he decide to capture the essence of the scene because he knew and loved the area? If anybody has any information about the artist I would like to hear more.



1856 Board of Health map; from the collections of the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre.

From the Chairman

Tessa Towner, Chairman.



Welcome to the first issue of 2013! I hope you all had a good Christmas and New Year celebration; it's hard to believe it is almost the end of January as I write.

It was with great sadness that I learnt of the death of Roy Murrant our first Chairman (see page 16) last November. He was a great friend and will be sorely missed.

This year sees the end of our Heritage Lottery Fund project to catalogue the Rochester City Archives, and I would like to acknowledge the dedication of our members involved with this project, with of course many thanks going to Valerie Rouland the Project Archivist. Without all her hard work the project could not have been accomplished, and she has now moved on to pastures new (see *The Clock Tower*. Issue 25, February 2012). For FOMA the project has been a great learning curve and I think we all found out something we didn't know about the history of Rochester. The putting together of exhibitions, taking our findings into schools, and talks in the community, these were all experiences we will hopefully continue in the future. We must also thank Alison Cable, Borough Archivist, for her guidance throughout the project and the staff at MALSC for all their help.

Finally, I am sure you will be delighted to hear that the Dean of Rochester Cathedral, the Rev Dr Mark Beach, has agreed to become the new FOMA Patron. Dr. Beach says he is looking forward to meeting us and to learning more about what we do.

New Members

A warm welcome to new FOMA members:

Mrs Doris Herlihy,
Mr Terry Stephens,
Mrs Sue Cherry,
Mr John Cherry.

Help is always needed with events.
If you think you could help, please contact Elaine Gardner on 01634 408595 or email emgardner@virginmedia.com

News and Events

Odette Buchanan, Friends' Secretary

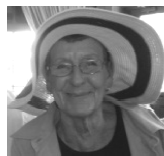
Hullo all!

I'm writing this just after the two or three days of snow we had. As usual, the press went mad with headlines of cancelled trains and stuck cars, etc.. Personally, I don't know why they bother taking new photos of these peculiarly British problems – why not just recycle all those they took last year and the year before and the year before that? Why not just use the same text and just change the date? They also start revisiting 'bad winters we have known.'

I will visit my memories for the next *Clock Tower*. For this one Amanda has requested our memories of the horrendous floods of 1953, and you can read these, which include my own, on pages 28 to 38. Of course there are other anniversaries to mark. It is 150 years since the first tube train rumbled under London and 60 years since the Queen's Coronation, to name but two. I am too young to remember the opening of the Metropolitan Line but I remember the Coronation well – the pubs were open all day - but more of that, I expect, in a future edition, too.

However, back to 2013 and first of all I was delighted to hear the news that the new Dean of Rochester Cathedral, Dr. Beach, has kindly agreed to be our Patron. We have Great Expectations of a long and fruitful Patronage. The Heritage Lottery Project is complete now and has enabled FOMA to achieve a major aim: raising the awareness of the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre. Thanks to the education outreach aspect of the project, we have made the facilities available at MALSC known to all the schools in Medway as well as supplying many with packs of information relevant to the topics they are studying. On a more personal note, I have written a book about Broomhill in Strood which is being edited even as we speak. It is due to be published by The City of Rochester Society later in the year.

We continue to receive interesting and challenging enquires from around the world. Do read the latest ones in *Readers' Letters* on page 11 and let us know if you can help. To conclude, please do support FOMA events, which are listed on the following page. There is a wonderful talk coming up on 12 March by David Carder called Hospitals and Almshouses, and a quiz on 27th April. Most important of all is the FOMA AGM on Tuesday, 16th April at 7.00 for 7.30 pm. This edition of *The Clock Tower* contains a special insert which you will need to bring with you. You'll also need money for your annual subs, of course! I hope 2013 will be a healthy and prosperous one for you and yours.



Cindy's Little Gems

Cindy O'Halloran



Cindy is Senior Archive and Local Studies Assistant at MALSC, responsible for the daily management of the searchroom and non professional staff. She has worked at MALSC for six years following 12 years in branch libraries and as a teaching assistant at a local primary school. Cindy's interests include reading, gardening and anything to do with history, her main passion being the 17th century and the English Civil Wars.

World's End

Some of our readers may be familiar with the area of Chatham once known as World's End. Jenkins' Dale, as it is better known, lies barely half a mile from the town centre and is well known for the old chalk pit scarring the landscape. The old chalk workings are still visible although now house a small business estate and Coronation Flats. This block was built in the 1950s to replace the old Victorian housing of Jenkins' Place and further slum clearance made way for the newer housing in Warner and Skinner Streets. This backwater of Chatham is the subject of one of the little gems held in our local studies collection.

A brightly coloured watercolour (see the inside back cover), reminiscent of a child's painting, shows Jenkins' Dale many years ago when fields surrounded it, a semi rural retreat despite its proximity to the town. The chalk workings and limekilns are clearly visible within the little enclave of World's End whilst in the foreground a top-hatted figure casually tends his rows of vegetables. A pipe-smoking labourer watches the artist and an old dame peers curiously over the hedge in the lane. Beyond the little group of cottages Chalk Pit Hill can be seen with a house and barns cresting the hill. The 1866 Ordnance Survey map of the area may throw some light as to how World's End became so named. Beyond this point there were no further buildings or streets, fields stretched far into the distance with only a few scattered farms along the Maidstone Road. The noise and squalor of Chatham town was confined to the ribbon of development along the High Street and Brook. New Road that lay close to Jenkins' Dale was still newly developed and the Toll Gate by St Paul's Church deterred development.

It is difficult to date this picture with any degree of accuracy although it was probably painted around the late 1860s. From the perspective shown by the artist it is difficult

The Committee

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The Very Reverend Dr. Mark Beach
Dean of Rochester

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Calendar of Forthcoming Events and Exhibitions

FOMA Events

12th March 2013, 7.30 pm

Hospitals and Almshouses

A talk by David Carder

The origins and development of medieval hospitals and their post-medieval successors, almshouses, including many examples from Kent and the Medway towns

Tuesday, 16th April 2013, 7.00 for 7.30 pm

FOMA AGM

Business will be followed by light refreshments.

Saturday 27th April, 7.30 pm start

Quiz Night

£5 for members and non-members. **BOOKING REQUIRED.**

Please note, booking for FOMA talks is no longer necessary! All events - and until further notice - are at Frindsbury Parish Hall. Talks are £3 for members, £5 non-members. Booking for Quiz Nights and enquiries through the FOMA Secretary: Odette Buchanan , 72 Jersey Rd, Strood, ME2 3PE; odette_buchanan@yahoo.co.uk; 01634 718231.

MALSC Events

Exhibitions

31st January – 5th March January 2013

Water Everywhere

The 1953 Floods in NW Kent

(See Norma Crowe's article on page 33)

7th March - 9th April

Royal Engineers 200

Celebrating the Royal Engineers at Brompton

11th April - 31st May

Time and Tides

An exhibition of work inspired by the Icon Theatre Project in Cuxton, Upnor, Wainscott and High Halstow

6th June - 6th August
Gillingham High Street
A photographic record

8th August - 1st October
The Cliffe History Project
Cliffe in the 20th century; a village history

18th November - 28th January 2014
Beyond the Green Baize Door
Life at Cobham Hall above and below stairs

MALSC OPENING HOURS

Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday 9.00 am to 5.00 pm; Saturday 9.00 am to 4.00 pm. Wednesday and Sunday closed.

Talks and Events

9th February, 12 noon - 3.00 pm
What If?
Creating and writing speculative fiction
Philip Kane

BOOKING ESSENTIAL

13th March, 2.30 pm
Royal Engineers 200
The Growth of Brompton Village
Amy Adams, Assistant Curator, RE Museum

22nd May, 2.30 pm
Frederic Wheeler
Social Reformer Extraordinaire. Celebrating 350 years of Rochester Quakers
Catharina Clement

20th September, 7.30 pm
Kentish Family Names
Dr. Paul Cullen

Please note, this event will be held at the Rochester Community Hub, Eastgate, Rochester, ME1 1EW; telephone: 01634 337411. Further information at: <http://www.medway.gov.uk/leisureandculture/libraries/findalibrary/rochestercommunityhub.aspx>

New Road, St Paul's and St Mary's Schools, Chatham

Log books, admissions, photographs [New Rd] Admission registers [St Paul's]; Log books [St Mary's]; C/ES/85/4; C/ES/85/10; C/ES/85/1; 1863-1994; 2 boxes.

Strood Methodist Church

Sunday School minutes, choir a/cs.; N/M5/2E uncat; 1923-1979; 3 vols.

St Philip and St James Parish, Chatham

Annotated/dedicated Bible; P85f uncat; 1 vol.

St Margaret's Parish, Ifield

Confirmation register; P201/1C/1; 1953-2012; 1 vol.

All Saints Parish, Frindsbury

Marriage register; P150/1/D/1; 1992-2012; 1 vol.

Former pupil of Ordnance County Secondary School

Scrapbook: Ordnance County Secondary School; DE1235/1; 1946-1948; 1 booklet.

Rayner and Sturges, collar makers, Gillingham

Receipts: Sturges family and Rayner and Sturges, collar makers; DE1236/1-2; 1940s-1950s; 2 bundles.

The Victoria County History and Editors' Footnotes *will return in the next issue of* The Clock Tower.

The Clock Tower is now fully indexed!

There is now a pdf on the FOMA website (www.foma-lsc.org/newsletter.html) which lists the contents of all the issues since Number 1 in April 2006. In addition, each of the past issues now includes a list of contents; these are highlighted with an asterisk (*).

If you have missed any of the previous issues and some of the articles published, they are all available to read on the website. Read them again - *A Stroll through Strood* by Barbara Marchant (issue 4); *In Search of Thomas Fletcher Waghorn (1800-1850)* by Dr Andrew Ashbee (issue 6); *The Other Rochester and the Other Pocahontas* by Ruth Rosenberg-Naparsteck (issue 6); *Jottings in the Churchyard of All Saints Frindsbury* by Tessa Towner (issue 8); *The Skills of the Historian* by Dr Kate Bradley (issue 9); *The Rosher Family: From Gravesend to Hollywood* by Amanda Thomas (issue 9); *George Bond, Architect and Surveyor, 1853 to 1914* by Pat Salter and Bob Ratcliffe (issue 10) plus all the regular features on the Victoria County History by Dr. Sandra Dunster and Dr. Andrew Hann, Edwin Harris by Janet Knight and Alison Thomas, not to mention regular contributors such as Betty Cole, Brian Joyce, JL Keys, Peter Burstow, Odette Buchanan and Catharina Clement.

Archives Update

Alison Cable, Borough Archivist



The Archives of Great Expectations

Our Heritage Lottery Fund project, the Archive of Great Expectations, is now completed, however work on the outreach component will be on going for a little while yet. We are due to distribute a disc of images to Medway schools, in the hope that some of the document images can be used by teachers. Also we hope that the examples given on the discs of documents will encourage teachers and students to come in and find out more about the collection. We are also still trying to find new locations for the exhibition.

Summary of Archive Accessions for 2012

This is extracted from the return that we are required to send to The National Archives every January. The majority of the new acquisitions are fully catalogued.

William Horsenail and John Hughes (deed parties)

Conveyance of house and gardens in south Strood; DE1228/1; 1806; 1 parchment.

Chalk parish church

Correspondence, minutes, accounts 'Friends of Chalk Church'; P77/28/5; 1991-2003; 1 folder.

WER Randall estate agent/surveyor, Chatham

Papers mainly relating to the Willis and Batchelor families: leases, conveyances, letters re properties in Chatham and Gillingham; DE1230/1-13; 1901-1972; 1 box.

Mr N E Theobald, local council worker

Work note books and employment contract as painter for Medway Borough Council DE1231/1-2; 1967-1975; 3 items.

Manor of Chatham

Sale documents (mainly sales particulars); DE1232/1-5; 1815-1942; 10 items.

Parish of St Philip & St James, Walderslade, Chatham

Baptism register; P85f/1B/3; 1962-1968; 1 item.

St Augustine's Parish Church, Gillingham

Order of service 1944; Jubilee booklet 1966; Parish History 1988; P153H (addl) uncat; 1944-1988; 3 items.

St Nicholas Parish, Strood

Parish magazines; P150B (addl) uncat; 1 box.

October (date to be confirmed)

Cliffe and the Marshes

A guided walk during Kent Coastal week

Bill Simmonds

20th November, 10.30 am - 12 noon

Local Politics, Rochester Guildhall and Medway in the 19th Century

An illustrated talk to mark Parliament Week 2013, using contemporary political posters

Jeremy Clarke

Unless otherwise indicated, all the above are held at the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre, (MALSC) Civic Centre, Strood, Rochester, Kent ME2 4AU. Unless otherwise indicated, talks and events are £5 or £4 for FOMA members. Further information is available from MALSC; please telephone 01634 332714 to book. TICKETS MUST BE BOOKED IN ADVANCE.

Please note: You may be aware that Medway Council has been relocated to Gun Wharf. This move does not include the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre and until further notice, we are still to be found in the Clock Tower building, address as above.

Eastgate House

Eastgate House is one of Rochester's landmarks. Built in the 1590s by Sir Peter Buck, the most senior member of staff at Chatham Dockyard, its structure has been adapted considerably over the years, but research has indicated that the original building may be Medieval or earlier. A Heritage Lottery Grant awarded in January 2011 has enabled Medway Council to begin planning conservation work on the house and to start opening its doors once more to visitors. In the autumn, the Friends of Eastgate House was set up and on 28 January 2012 a very successful open day was held to raise awareness of the work at Eastgate House.

Tracy Stringfellow of Medway Council has been working tirelessly to secure the Heritage Lottery Fund grant for the renovation of Eastgate House (for news on the progress of this exciting project see Elaine Gardner's article on page 19) and is now moving to a new challenge as the manager of a Heritage Centre in Greenwich. Eastgate House will be open for events until works start in the summer. Further information can be obtained at: <http://www.friendsof-eastgatehouse.org> on Facebook on <http://www.facebook.com/eastgatehouse> and you can follow the FOEH on Twitter <https://twitter.com/EastgateHouse>

To join the Friends of Eastgate House, please contact The Membership Secretary, FoEH, 31 The Esplanade, Rochester, ME1 1QW; a copy of the membership form is also available on the website, as above.

The City of Rochester Society

"The City of Rochester Society was founded in 1967 to help conserve the historic City as a pleasant place to visit. The Society is still active today, helping to improve the environment and quality of life in Rochester for residents and visitors alike." Taken from the City of Rochester Society website, www.city-of-rochester.org.uk/, where further information on the society and how to join is available. Talks are on Wednesdays at the Auditorium of the Visitor Centre, 95 High Street, Rochester and start at 8.00 pm. There is a small charge for events to defray expenses; please contact the CoRS Secretary, Christine Furminger on 01634 320598 or at cafurminger@blueyonder.co.uk for further information and how to join. Our open members meetings take place on the second Wednesday of the month in the Auditorium at the Visitor Information Centre, Rochester. Guests are welcome and forthcoming speakers are as follows:

13th February

The present plans and new developments at Rochester Cathedral.

13th March

The new elm trees for Rochester.

Dr Hurley

10th April

The wreck of the USS Richard Montgomery.

Frank Turner

8th May

A talk on the organisation and development of the civic society movement

John Walker, Chairman of the Kent Federation of Amenity Societies and a Board Member of Civic Voice

15th May

Springtime President/Secretary Outing for Society members and our friends which will include a trip on the Kent and East Sussex Railway and a visit to Hole Park, Rolvenden, to enjoy the bluebells, azaleas and rhododendrons. For further information and to book please contact Chris Furminger on 01634 320598 or e-mail cafurminger@blueyonder.co.uk.

12th June

The City of Rochester Society AGM (further details are available as above).

All members welcome!

In 1861 John Chittenden was working as a labourer and living with his wife Sarah (née Springhall) at Buckhole Farm Cottage, next door to George Osenton and his family. Sarah's brothers Richard (whose widow lived at Cooling in 1911) and Samuel, my husband's great great grandfather were living at Duck Court (now Dux Court). However in 1869 my husband's great grandmother Clara Springhall was born at Buckhole where her father was a waggoner and the family were still there when the 1871 Census was taken.



seated left and his son Richard (Dick) (1905-1982) is wearing a white shirt and no waistcoat.

I would like to place on record my thanks to Mr Osenton for his hospitality and entertaining stories of life in Cooling. Of course I also enjoyed learning about his family tree, which helped to put some flesh on the bones of my husband's ancestors. My thanks also to Ian Smith for putting Mr Osenton in touch with me.

Old Photographs

Do you have any photographs which need identifying and you would like to be published in future issues of *The Clock Tower*? If so, please send them to the Editor, Amanda Thomas, amanda@ajthomas.com or to 72 Crabtree Lane, Harpenden, AL5 5NS, Hertfordshire.

I was delighted to accept [the invitation], and my husband John and I spent a very enjoyable Saturday morning there. It was so interesting to see photographs of the house in various stages of reconstruction and also to hear about members of the Smith and May families who had lived there. The cottage is one of a pair opposite the gatehouse of Cooling Castle which when viewed from a distance appear to have been carefully positioned to avoid obscuring views of that structure to anyone approaching from the south. Past occupants, such as the Springhall family who lived there in 1911, would almost certainly have worked on the farm at the castle.



Taken in the floods of 1953 this photo shows the pair of cottages opposite Cooling Castle gatehouse. Mr Osenton's house is in the distance. Aerial photographs show what appears to have been a trackway leading between the cottages to the gate house. Photo supplied by Margaret Smith author of Cooling. A Dickens of a Village. FOMA member Brian Butler provided some additional information. In this photograph, the cottage in the foreground was at one time occupied by Jim

Avis Godden and Foreman Elms. One presumes this was not at the same time and that perhaps Foreman Elms was a relation of Wally Elms who lived in the cottage under discussion.

John Skilling (left) and Mr Osenton (right) outside the cottage.

When Mr Osenton bought the cottage in 1971 it was uninhabitable. He has restored it and it is now a very comfortable family home. The ivy covering the outside of the house in the old picture hides the veranda and overhanging top storey, with the original window, which can be clearly seen in the 1953 picture above. The chimney on the side extension has been removed and the roof extended upwards to prevent water collecting in the join between the pitched roof and the wall of the main house. During the renovation works a cobbled floor, probably from former stables and an old well were found, also the remains of walls in the garden.



Friends of Broomhill

Sunday, 3rd March: Task Day. Meet in the car park at King Arthur's Drive entrance at 11.00 am. Tools provided or bring your own. Come and help plant more wild flowers

Sunday, 7th April: LAST Task Day of the season. Meet in car park at King Arthur's Drive entrance at 11.00 am. Tools provided or bring your own. Come and help with the final INTENSIVE LITTER PICK.

It's all FREE, it's FUN, it's HEALTHY and will help us keep our GREEN FLAG AWARD.

Further details from the secretary 01634 718231 or email odette_buchanan@yahoo.co.uk



The Royal Engineers Museum, Library and Archive

Prince Arthur Road, Gillingham, Kent, ME4 4UG; www.re-museum.co.uk/events

The Royal Engineers Museum is Kent's largest military museum, and holds its only Designated Collection of historical and international importance. The many galleries tell the story of Britain's military engineers from the Roman period to the modern Corps of Royal Engineers. The millions of items in its collection tell a sweeping epic of courage, creativity and innovation and the stories of individuals of great renown (General Gordon, Lord Kitchener, John Chard VC) and the average Sapper who has helped the British Army move, fight and survive for over 200 years.

Opening hours: Tuesday – Friday 9.00am to 5.00pm; Saturday – Sunday and Bank Holidays: 11.30am to 5.00pm; CLOSED MONDAYS. Admission: pay once and get in for 12 months! Adult: £7.80; Family: £20.80; Concession: £5.20; Children under 5: Free.



The following information is from Paul Tritton, Hon. Press Officer, Kent Archaeological Society. www.kentarchaeology.org.uk

Grants Available for Kent Local History Projects

March 31 2013 is the latest date by which applications for grants from the Kent Archaeological Society's Allen Grove Local History Fund can be accepted. More information is available at <http://www.kentarchaeology.org.uk/grants/>

Conference on Kent's Industrial Archaeology

The Kent Archaeological Society's South East Regional Industrial Archaeology Conference will take place at the Mick Jagger Centre, Dartford Grammar School, on Saturday April 27, 2013 (9am – 5pm).

More information is available at <http://www.kentarchaeology.org.uk>

About The Clock Tower

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

Editorial deadlines

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

The copy deadline for Issue 30 of *The Clock Tower* is Monday 29 April 2013, with publication on Wednesday 22 May 2013.

Publication date

The fourth Wednesday following the editorial deadline.

The Clock Tower is printed by Ray Maisey, Rabbit Hutch Printers, 106 Charles Drive, Cuxton, Kent, ME2 1DU; telephone: 01634 294655; fax: 01634 723510; email: Ray@Rabbithutchprinters.com

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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 Alexander Thomas.

The Clock Tower is also available at www.foma-lsc.org/newsletter.html

Further Information

Further information on the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre can be obtained on the MALSC CityArk website <http://cityark.medway.gov.uk/> or by writing to Medway Archives Office, Civic Centre, Strood, Rochester, Kent ME2 4AU. Telephone +44 (0)1634 332714; fax +44 (0)1634 297060; email: malsc@medway.gov.uk

General enquiries about the Friends can be obtained from the Secretary, Odette Buchanan: 72 Jersey Road, Rochester, ME2 3PE. Telephone: 01634 718231; email: odette_buchanan@yahoo.co.uk
Membership enquiries should be directed to the Membership Secretary, Betty Cole, 25 Elm Avenue, Chatham, Kent ME4 6ER. Telephone: 01634 316509; email: bettycole@blueyonder.co.uk

Mystery Photos

In a new series we look at unidentified photographs from MALSC and Clock Tower readers. If you have any information, please contact Mrs Amanda Thomas, Editor, The Clock Tower, 72 Crabtree Lane, Harpenden, Hertfordshire, AL5 5NS or email at amanda@ajthomas.com.

A few days after the publication of the photograph above in the last issue of *The Clock Tower* (issue 28, November 2012), the FOMA member who provided the photograph, our Treasurer, Jean Skilling, received a phone call from a non-member, Mr Fred Osenton. He had been given a copy of the article by FOMA member Ian Smith. Mr Osenton was able to confirm that it was indeed a photograph of one of the cottages opposite the gatehouse of Cooling Castle, as it has been his home for the last 40 years. Mr Osenton invited Jean (pictured) and her husband John to visit to see the place for themselves and to follow is Jean's account of what happened next.



Jean Skilling

The Osenton family have lived on the Hoo Peninsular since Henry Osenton arrived in Cliffe from Assington, Suffolk in the late 18th century. The story passed down in the family is that he had escaped the press gang by sailing down the river. After landing in Cliffe he obtained work as a thatcher. The family the names of some of those farms were familiar to me as a number of my husband's ancestors from the Springhall, Chittenden and Kenknight families worked on them and I was able to confirm from the 1861 and 1871 census returns for High Halstow that my husband's ancestors had worked at Buckhole Farm when it was owned by Mr Osenton's great great grandfather George Osenton and his son William (Buckhole Billy) prospered and one of Henry's grandsons, George Osenton (baptised at High Halstow in 1811) married well and purchased Buckhole Farm at High Halstow. George died in 1864 and at the time of the 1871 Census his son William, known as Buckhole Billy, had Buckhole Farm. His other son Alfred would later buy Dalham Farm and descendants of his owned farms including Whybornes and Solomon's Farms.

My other memory is much sadder. My piano teacher, Florence Miles, and her sister, Marie, were spinsters of around 50 years of age. In 1952 they sold their very large house inherited from the parents and emigrated to Canvey Island and what was known as a holiday chalet. When a small child, Marie had been thrown down the stairs by her father in a drunken rage and spent the rest of her life in a wheelchair; she taught violin. Being very friendly with them, my parents and I kept in touch after they left for Canvey Island. As if they hadn't suffered enough in their lives, imagine our horror when these kind, vulnerable old ladies were swept out of their fragile wooden home and Marie, unable to swim, was drowned. The house was totally destroyed and all the furniture and their possessions lost in the torrent. Florence was left totally alone in the world and, no longer able to teach piano because of severe arthritis, finished up down the West Country as a 'lady's companion.' The photo is Marie outside their house just after they moved in.

Marie Miles.



In the Bleak Mid-Winter of 1963

Catharina Clement reminded Clock Tower Editor Amanda Thomas that it was fifty years ago that we experienced one of the coldest winters of modern times. Amanda would like to hear from FOMA members about their memories of the winter of 1963. These - and Catharina's own recollections - will be printed in the next issue of The Clock Tower (Issue 30, May 2013) which we will hopefully be reading in warmer temperatures! Please send your memories to Amanda Thomas, Editor, The Clock Tower, 72 Crabtree Lane, Harpenden, AL5 5NS, Hertfordshire or at amanda@ajthomas.com

Readers' Letters

We welcome letters and emails from readers with their comments. If you have anything you would like to say please write to: Mrs Amanda Thomas, Editor, The Clock Tower, 72 Crabtree Lane, Harpenden, Hertfordshire, AL5 5NS or email at amanda@ajthomas.com. FOMA Secretary, Odette Buchanan, often receives queries from members or visitors to the FOMA website, www.foma-lsc.org/index.html. If you have any additional information for the following correspondents, please contact the Editor.

FOMA Donation

We would like to thank Mrs J. Petherick of Norwich for her kind donation of £25 to FOMA.

14 January 2013

Dear Mrs Cole,

Two years ago I received a lot of help from Cindy O'Halloran, MALSC, in my research into my grandfather's life as a school teacher in Gillingham. My grandfather, Henry Hammans, was killed in WWI. I had intended to send a donation to your organisation as a token of my appreciation for Cindy's help. I have no excuse for the delay in sending the enclosed cheque for £25! I hope it will be of help with the work you do for people like me.

Yours sincerely,
Jackie Petherick (Mrs.)

Bob Dunford: Charles and Mabel May Thomas Sampson

From: Terry Stephens

To: Odette Buchanan

Date: 2 December 2012

Hello Odette,

I have only just joined FOMA and received my first copy of the Journal on Friday last. It was the November 2012 edition and was intrigued to read your correspondence with Bob Dunford on pages 9 and 10. Being ever ready to try to help fellow family historians, I did a search on Ancestry.com for Bob's Devon ancestors and found several trees with his grandfather, Chas Steer Sampson in them. One has the direct line back to a William Sampson, born in Devon in 1760, with photos of some of the ancestors. I am not able to give Bob an email address to the tree owner, but I can, if he would like, ask the tree owner to contact Bob. To do this, I would of course have to have contact details for Bob, either email, postal address or phone number. I do

realise, though, that revealing such information can be troublesome in this day and age (sadly!). If you are able to contact Bob and pass this on, I would be happy for Bob to contact me, if he has access to email, so that I could then set the wheels rolling. I have done this sort of exercise before, but sometimes I get no response from the tree owner on Ancestry. I am enjoying reading the journal; it may be small but it has a lot of interesting articles in it!

Best regards,

Terry Stephens (151).

We have tried to put Terry Stephens and Bob Dunford in contact with each other, but unfortunately we have not heard from Mr Dunford for some time. Naturally, this is of concern, and if any member knows Mr Dunford, please could they get in touch with the Editor, Amanda Thomas, as above.

Will Adams

From: Terry Stephens

To: Betty Cole

Sent: November 30, 2012

Dear Betty,

...My mother's mother was an Adams, reputed to have been a descendant of the famous Will Adams, but I can get back only to a Robert Adams, who was born in Gillingham in 1810 and died in his early 40s. As far as I am aware, Will Adams had a son and a daughter in England and another son and daughter in Japan, but my research, which is very limited, does not show either son as having children, who would have carried on the Adams name. I do believe, though, that Will had a brother, but can find nothing more about him. My great-uncle, Owen Adams, whom I never met, was apparently interviewed about his ancestor Will, but, again, I have no idea if it was for the Beeb or a magazine/newspaper. So I am constantly trying to find this link with a famous sailor, about whom, I have to admit, I had never heard until I started researching my Medway ancestors! Kindest regards,
Terry.

Clock Tower Fan Mail

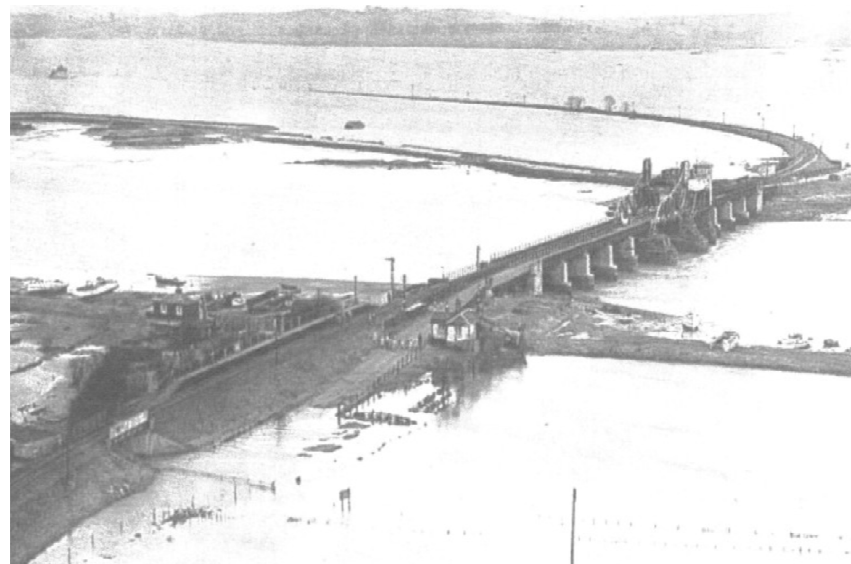
From: Colin Hicks

To: Amanda Thomas

Sent: 26 November 2012

Hi Amanda

I have just read the latest *Clock Tower* No 28. To me it is the best one I have read. Well done. Best wishes,
Colin Hicks, member no. 99.



Kingsferry Bridge, looking towards Sheerness

Reproduced with the kind permission of Paul Dummott

pauldummott@supanet.com; www.sheernessheritagecentre.com

Elaine Gardner writes:

We had been in Chatham just a month or so because dad was working for BP at the refinery and we were living at the top of Magpie Hall Road next to what was then called Christchurch Girls School. I never actually saw any of the floods because that was the week my sister and I both went down with measles. Mum was very relieved when dad arrived back home having not been able to get to work because both the refinery and the centre of Chatham were flooded and buses weren't running.

Odette Buchanan writes:

My general memory is that the floods down the east coast and around the Thames and Medway estuaries were, like the hurricane of '87, totally unexpected. Everywhere was ill-prepared for the total devastation and loss of life. Against this background I have two personal memories. My then fiancé was in the first of his two years' National Service with the RAF. He was in the MT Division and so was drafted to seriously flooded areas to drive a DUCK (amphibious craft first used at the D-Day landings). He never spoke of any hardships or deaths in either his letters or when home on leave. He looked upon it as one big joke and was pleased with the extra money in his pay packet.

that I expect had been placed to get cool so it could be used for drinking, but I don't think I was allowed to help myself or to use the tap!

KFHS Member Gillian Evans writes:

At the time of the floods In 1953 I was nine and a half years old and attending St Nicholas Junior School, situated at the bottom end of Free School Lane [Rochester]. The school is no longer there and the area the school stood on is now a car park. The school was just outside what remains of the old city wall. Because the school was flooded - how badly, I have no idea - we were all temporarily relocated to the new school that had been built on The Tideway. The classrooms had plenty of glass, which was something we weren't used to at St Nicholas! The sun shone on us, and I must have got quite a nasty dose of the heat, for I suddenly felt very sick - can't remember whether I was - and had to be moved from sitting by the window to the other side of the classroom.

I now live in Millbrook in Cornwall, and just a few weeks ago, our village was flooded by water running off the land and into the valley where Millbrook sits. Affected residents were furious that the water in the lake (which had been dammed years ago to prevent the regular flooding of the village at high tides) had not been released prior to the bad weather that had been widely forecast.

Keith Lambourne writes:

I did some research on this when I was working in TV News (see *The Clock Tower*, Issue 21, February 2011). Here are some video links that might be of interest:

<http://www.eafa.org.uk/search.aspx#&&page=1&navid=&psize=10&text=essex+floods+1953>

http://www.itnsources.com/en/shotlist/BHC_FoxMovietone/1953/02/09/X09025301/?s=essex+floods+1953&st=0&pn=1

<http://www.britishpathe.com/video/east-coast-gale-disaster/query/essex+floods+1953>

<http://www.britishpathe.com/video/canvey-island-floods/query/essex+floods+1953>

Also there are some good stills amongst Sheerness Heritage Centre's floods collection at:

<http://www.sheernessheritagecentre.com/apps/photos/album?albumid=6786002>

Lastly, more commercial stills to look at:

<http://www.gettyimages.co.uk/Search/Search.aspx?contractUrl=2&language=en-GB&assetType=image&excludenudity=true&p=kent+floods+1953>

<http://www.gettyimages.co.uk/Search/Search.aspx?contractUrl=2&language=en-GB&assetType=image&excludenudity=true&p=essex+floods+1953>

War-Time Memories

From: Barry Cox

To: Amanda Thomas

Sent: 25 November 2012

Re. Bob Ratcliffe's Strood V2 incident. When I was a boy (1950- 1954) I went in the school holidays with my Auntie who worked on English's farm at Rede Court. We kids used to play where Winget's Sports ground pavilion is now; then there was a line of trees. We used to find pieces of aluminium wedged in the trees, the old farm hands that worked there during the war said they were from a rocket that came down nearby. Up until five years ago I still had a piece of it. The trees have been removed for some time now but we used to find bits all the time and also in the surrounding field.

Barry.

52 and 83 High Street, Rochester

This query was kindly forwarded to us by FOMA member Christine Furminger, who is also Secretary of The City of Rochester Society.

To: Christine Furminger

Sent: November 10, 2012

Good evening Christine,

I've had a lovely day exploring the Rochester High Street. I am down here celebrating a friend's wedding and have also used the trip to bring some life to my family tree. I have ancestors who lived originally at no 52 and then 83 High Street. Sadly my trip was slightly frustrated by the Archives being closed for stock taking so I have been unable to learn more about my ancestors. However, the owner of Rochester Handbags on the High Street, suggested I contact you. His suggestion was that the Society would hold records that may answer my questions. If the Society can help me, would you put me in touch with somebody who can help me directly please. I am interested in knowing more about the Thorpe's who lived at 52 High Street around 1881-1891+ who then moved to 83 High Street (were there in 1901 census).

Any assistance you can offer will be gratefully received. Many thanks.

Kind regards,

Beverley Thorpe.

From: Christine Furminger
To: Beverley Thorpe
Sent: 11 November 2012

Dear Beverley,

Thank you for your interesting e-mail and for taking the trouble to contact us. Our archives are concerned with the Society itself rather than Rochester, although I have copied in our Archivist in case he has any titbits of useful information for you (having lived locally all his life!) I am always happy to put people in touch with others who will be able to assist. I am forwarding your e-mail to people closely involved with Friends of Medway Archives and the Kent Family History Society - I am sure you will be hearing from them both very shortly. I know that Medway Archives have been exploring the background of Rochester High Street - all local groups have many members in common! All the best with your research - do let me know how you get on, if you have time.

Kind regards,
Christine Furminger,
Hon. Secretary, City of Rochester Society.

Correspondence was also forwarded to Amanda Thomas, *Clock Tower* Editor, as follows.

From: Beverley Thorpe
To: Amanda Thomas
Sent: 14 November 2012

Hello All,

I am so grateful for your interest in my Thorpe query, it is one that has been nagging at me for a while. Alfred Thorpe born 1851, was the son of a Draper and did work as an apprentice in a shop in Hastings before relocating to Rochester. I do not however think that he brought this trade to Rochester. In the census returns I have him as a cabbie and an insurance salesman. Alfred was married to Amelia in 1877. They had two daughters - Gertrude and Mildred. What I find particularly interesting is that Alfred is not mentioned in the 1891/1901 census. Amelia is recorded as the Head of the household yet is still married (not widowed). Amelia is noted as 'living on her own means'. Having seen 83 High Street for myself, I am very interested in knowing more about this family. I have a sneaky suspicion that Alfred may be rogue! A less scandalous idea is that he emigrated with his brother to Buenos Aires. An image of 52 High Street would be wonderful. Again, I am very grateful for your time.

Best regards,
Beverley.

Regrettably some of the lessons which should have been learned from the floods of the first half of the 20th Century have been forgotten or ignored in the intervening 60 years, with scant regard paid to the importance of maintaining the flood plain; of keeping ditches and drains clear; of the usefulness of dewponds and culverts. Flooding still occurs in the 21st Century. We cannot consign this natural phenomenon to history, but we should and must make sure that we pay heed to the lessons of the past; spend money where necessary to maintain our flood defences, and respect the power of nature to encroach, submerge and reclaim land from time to time.

Members' Memories of the 1953 Floods

Barry Cox writes:

In 1953 I lived in Friary Place Strood at my grandparents' house. Everybody in the street had to move out afterwards because floodwater and sewage went at least three feet up the walls and in those days there was no way of drying houses out. They were demolished soon after. I was eight at the time and have never seen Strood as bad...we had to go to an upstairs bedroom and be helped out of the window, I was eight and my Gran had no insurance so lost most of her furniture and other goods: remember everyone had outside toilets then. The flood water came up through the drains, they didn't know about the caps on outflows then. The ground was cleared and it then became where they held Strood Market. Underneath is the old twelfth century hospital. The area was known as The Manor of Boncakes. Many of the residents were re-housed around Strood and Rochester, thus a breakup of a well established community. My family had been in that place since it had been built. My Great Grandfather was a blacksmith and owned a few of the houses. All of Strood from Canal road to Angel Corner was flooded even where Morrison's is now was called *the swamp*.

Christine Furminger writes:

[I lived in Whitstable and]...remember it vividly - I saw a barrel from my bedroom window as it floated past the house, in the road! This was early in the day, I was only six, and could not work out what was going on. My big brother (aged 14) spent the day stuffing slips of paper through the floorboards under the lino, measuring how near the water was coming to the floor, to try to discover if we were going to get flooded. We were lucky, but next door had lower foundations and they were less so! The drying out of buildings took forever and affected prices - salt water never disappears. I have also remembered that we could not drink water without boiling it. I have no idea how long this continued - it might have been for several days. It was quite an innovation to a child - I seem to remember there was a covered bowl containing water

- the digging of brick earth along the creeks of the Medway
- the construction of wharves and depots by the Admiralty among others and, shortly before the tidal surge of 1953:
- the development of a major industrial plant on the Isle of Grain, namely the Kent Oil Refinery.

When trade and transport to and from the Medway Towns was made by water and Chatham Dockyard was operating at full capacity, the River Medway was routinely dredged to keep the deep-water channel clear. Dredging activities were reduced during the latter part of the 20th century, as the volume of river traffic decreased.

The 1953 tidal surge occurred only days before the newly-built oil refinery was due to begin production. It showed the weakness of the existing coastal defences, which were mainly clay embankments, all of which were too low to withstand a major rise in sea level. Remarkably the job of clearing up and rectifying the damage at the oil refinery was carried out with speed, and the refinery was able to open only three weeks later, as originally planned. By mid February the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company was able to state confidently that no major damage had occurred, and the steam turbine pumps which had been submerged had already been overhauled; roads to the site had re-opened and most of the flood water had been pumped away. The coastal defences had also been repaired and improved. Along the Kent coast there were around 400 breaches of the sea wall and coastal defences, many of them up to a kilometre in length.

Tidal Surges and Flooding

When high tides and strong winds occur together they can cause tidal surges, which result in serious flooding. This was the problem with the winter storm which raged on 31st January, 1953. A northerly gale caused a surge of approximately nine feet. Mercifully the surge did not peak at the same time as the tide, so the high water level on that night was just over seven feet. Nevertheless the damage caused down the east coast was extensive, with the Essex marshes and Canvey Island suffering severe damage and fatalities. Had the surge and the high tide coincided, the resulting flooding would have been much worse.

The speed with which the flooding happened that night and the implications of similar and potentially more serious problems occurring in the future were instrumental in bringing about major improvements in flood defences and warning systems in the South East, and elsewhere. This exhibition is a visual record of 20th century floods along the River Medway and the tidal surge of 1953, with contemporary accounts from local government archives and the newspapers of the Medway Towns. It gives an insight into the immediate reaction to the crisis of 31st January 1953, and shows how the authorities worked with local residents and volunteers to plug breaches in the river defences and rescue livestock and isolated neighbours. It also reveals what measures were taken to prevent a repeat in the future.

From: Amanda Thomas
To: Beverley Thorpe

Beverley,

We are always happy to help and I will be publishing your query in the next issue of our journal *The Clock Tower* as this often generates responses. Yours is an interesting story and one I have seen before in this period. If you haven't already got a subscription for Ancestry, you might find it useful to invest in one as it could help to track Alfred down. My experience with this sort of thing (others may not agree) is that rogues like Alfred often did not go very far, though the Buenos Aires theory is fascinating – have you found his brother? Normally one hears of America, Australia or Canada, and this is so far-fetched it could have an air of truth. However, I suggest a more careful look at the 1901 census. You may find him tucked away somewhere in London with a new family! Let me know how you get on, Amanda.

The Family Tree of Vincent Van Gogh

Brian Butler



To keep everyone smiling through the cold winter months, FOMA member Brian Butler shares some new historical information he has recently received from his cousin in America regarding the family tree of the artist Vincent Van Gogh. Please note, it helps to pronounce the artist's name as Americans do, Van Go.

His dizzy aunt
The brother who ate prunes
The brother who worked at a convenience store
The grandfather from Yugoslavia
His magician uncle
The nephew who drove a stage coach
The constipated uncle
The ballroom dancing aunt
The bird lover uncle
An aunt who taught positive thinking
The little bouncy nephew
A sister who loved disco
And his niece who travels the country in an RV

Verti Gogh
Gotta Gogh
Stop N Gogh
U Gogh
Where-diddy Gogh
Wells-far Gogh
Can't Gogh
Tang Gogh
Flamin Gogh
Way-to-Gogh
Poe Gogh
Go Gogh
Winnie Bay Gogh

I saw you smiling ... there ya Gogh

Obituary

Roy Arthur Murrant
10th August 1932 - 27th November 2012

It is with great sadness that I learnt of the death of Roy Murrant last November; Roy was the first Chairman of FOMA. Born in the Lambeth area of London in 1932, he was called up for National Service and joined the RAF as an RAF policeman serving from 1950 to 1953. Roy was quite a character, very unassuming, always belittling his capabilities, and always telling jokes. Roy and his wife Audrey married in 1954 and lived near Crystal Palace, they moved to Luton in 1958 and have lived there ever since. He had an allotment too, where he spent many happy hours, and shared his produce with all of us. He could be found most Sunday lunchtimes at the Hen and Chicks in Luton passing on his knowledge of the pubs no longer there.

Roy worked for the Post Office as a store man for much of his working life, retiring in 1990. He had been researching the demise of the local pubs since the early 1980s but on retiring it became an interesting occupation and an excuse to sample the wares of many pubs (not that he really needed an excuse!) This led him to decide to research the public houses of the Medway Towns past and present and many hours spent, first at the Guildhall where the records were kept, thinking that he would have done it all in six weeks! Then when MALSC opened he continued his work searching the records for information on locations of pubs that had disappeared. Twenty years on he was still searching. He spent many a weekend touring around in his three-wheeler taking photographs of the pub exteriors together with their pub signs and naturally finding time to pop in! All this led to the publication of his first book, *A Glossary of Past & Present Pubs of Chatham (A to M)*. He was also chairman of the Chatham Historical Society for many years, and a committee member of the Medway branch of the Kent Family History Society.

Roy was well loved by many and this was evident by the 125 people who turned out in the pouring rain to attend his funeral at Medway Crematorium on 14th December. The service was very light hearted, starting off with Roy's favourite music, Glenn Miller's *Moonlight Serenade* and ending with the *Ying Tong* song from the Goon Show which had everyone laughing. It was so typical! Roy was apparently an avid fan of the Goons. Our sincere sympathy goes to his family: wife Audrey, children Duncan, Robert and Hazel, and all his grandchildren.

I miss his phone calls which usually ended with, "...have I told you the one about...?"

Tessa Towner, FOMA Chairman



FIVE DAY FLOOD SALE

All damaged goods
must be cleared.

Bargains in Furniture—
Bedroom, Dining Room and
Settee Suites.

Fashionwear and Drapery

HARWOOD'S
TEL 7636 **of STROOD**

inundated in 1953 were no strangers to clearing up after floods. They had suffered flooding before and would do so again until improvements in the sea walls and the erection of pumping stations in strategic locations prevented the reoccurrence of the problem in the long term.

*From the Chatham News, 2 February 1953;
the collections of the Medway Archives and Local Studies
Centre and courtesy of Parrett and Neaves.*

Water Everywhere: The 1953 Floods in NW Kent

Norma Crowe

Norma has been Local Studies Librarian at MALSC since May 1995. Previous posts were as librarian at Erith College of Technology, Hampshire County Libraries and the Radcliffe Science Library, Oxford. Norma has many interests which include visiting historic sites, singing, dancing and sampling real ale.



From 31st January to 5th March January MALSC is hosting an exhibition entitled, *Water Everywhere. The 1953 Floods in NW Kent*, to coincide with the 60th anniversary of the flood. Norma Crowe MALSC Local Studies Librarian has kindly supplied *The Clock Tower* with some of the information to be used in the exhibition.

Coastal defences on the Isle of Grain and along the River Medway

Over the centuries changes to the natural shoreline of the Isle of Grain and the River Medway were made for agricultural and industrial and safety reasons. These alterations had affected the natural flow of water, particularly at times of very high tides. They included:

- the draining of the marshes on the Hoo Peninsula and the Isle of Grain
- the construction of a sea wall around the Hoo Peninsula and the Isle of Grain

the tune of a million pounds. It was predicted that the refinery's opening could be delayed for several months. Fortunately, once the flood water was pumped out, the damage proved to be not as extensive as initially feared. Meanwhile, tugs from the Ship Pier in Rochester ferried workers across to the refinery site.

While Sheerness and the Isle of Sheppey was the worst-hit area in Kent as a whole, the Hoo Peninsula was probably the part of the Medway Towns area that suffered most. Forty-six homes were flooded, 28 of which were in Lower Upnor. The peninsula's railway lines were washed away in some places and telephone wires cut. The water supply to Grain, which ran through pipes across the marshes, broke down. Emergency supplies were pumped in from old wells, but residents were instructed to boil it. By Tuesday, the Water Company had connected the public main to the oil refinery's own water supply, which was unaffected. Police launches supplied daily deliveries of milk and bread to Grain until the floodwater receded and damaged roads and railways could be repaired.



The pumping out of water following the floods on the Hoo Peninsula; from the collections at the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre, photograph originally donated by the Kent River Board.

The Aftermath

Despite the dramatic events described above, the Medway Towns area got back to normal surprisingly quickly. A Business As Usual spirit, born of the Second World War and post-war austerity, helped people overcome many of the problems caused by the floods. The Army, swollen by conscription during the Cold War, provided the manpower to aid the civil authorities. Besides, the town centres and riverfront areas

The MALSC Volunteer Morning

Amanda Thomas



A meeting lasting an entire week at MALSC would not have been long enough for everyone to catch up on their news and the various projects going on. There was a real buzz in the Search Room when everyone got together on Wednesday 21 November 2012 for the Volunteer Morning, led, as always, by Local Studies Librarian and FOMA member, Norma Crowe. The morning began with a review of the projects undertaken in 2012, and as follows: The soldiers who died in the Great War, the index of Medway men (see *The Clock Tower*, Issue 28, November 2012): Tessa Towner.

The Times and Tides project study packs for Cuxton, Wainscott and High Halstow: Pauline Weeds, Jill Payne and Doris Herlihy.

Glass plate negatives digitisation; the glass plate collection is now available at MALSC: Roger Smoothy

Transcription of crew lists/shipping registers: Steve Cross

Processing, labelling and tidying: Jill Payne and Pauline Weeds

Dickens Collection: Harriet Hopkins

Collection sorting and listing: April Lambourne

Setting up and manning exhibitions in other locations, especially Eastgate House in Rochester: Alan Moss, Elaine Gardner, Bob Ratcliffe, Odette Buchanan and Betty Cole.

The exhibitions at Eastgate House are always well attended; Kevin Russell is currently looking at how to develop this.

Will Adams Festival and the FOMA/KFHS/MALSC stall: Tessa Towner, Elaine Gardner, Rob Flood

Half day Family History courses for beginners : Tessa Towner and Brenda Paternoster

The Sporting Life: Kevin Russell

The Defence of Medway: Rob Flood

Department Stores and Shopping: Jean Lear

High Halstow display: Pauline Weeds and Jill Payne

Rainham reminiscence session: Doris Herlihy

Kent Family History Society weekly helpdesk: Colin Allen, Brenda Burchell, Eric Flood, Hazel Harvey, Tony Clarke, Brenda Paternoster, Jean Skilling, Tessa Towner and Steve Cross

The FOMA website and *The Clock Tower*: Webmaster Alexander Thomas, Editor Amanda Thomas and all contributors.

Additional thanks went the FOMA Committee, Tessa Towner, Elaine Gardner, Jean Skilling, Odette Buchanan, Betty Cole, Dr. Sandra Dunster, Bob Ratcliffe, Rob Flood,

Brian Joyce, Kevin Russell and Amanda Thomas.

Norma went on to explain how the exhibitions and displays, which are such a popular attraction at MALSC, are often transported elsewhere in the Medway area, and in 2012 locations included High Halstow and Rainham library.

Gwynne Grant, Community Librarian for Medway Libraries was the morning's guest speaker. Gwynne explained how there has been a long tradition of volunteers in the area and so it is no surprise that the Friends of Medway Libraries and FOMA should work so successfully together. A Volunteer Policy has recently been introduced by Medway Council to facilitate the process of recruitment of volunteers; a copy of the policy is available at MALSC and on the website at

<http://www.medway.gov.uk/pdf/Medway%20Libraries%20Volunteer%20Policy%202012.pdf>

The management team had now agreed to extend expenses to more volunteers, and there is little doubt that this acts as an incentive. It is hoped that this policy will extend to MALSC and especially in the case of the family history volunteers; more information is available at MALSC. Volunteers were also reminded to fill in the log book at MALSC.

Norma concluded this part of the morning's session with a reminder that all volunteers are representatives of Medway Council and that it is also important that all the work which is conducted should be confined to the Archives. Privacy is essential particularly as some of the work undertaken is covered by the data protection laws, and this is especially relevant for family history. However, from the amount of praise volunteers receive from the public, it is evident that everyone does an excellent job. Project work will continue in 2013 and volunteers are required for the following: Photographic Collections; sorting, packaging, identifying and listing; exhibitions; preparation, digitising (from now on folders will be separately compiled as a new resource in the Archives; mounting; housekeeping. On-going activities include: family history helpdesk; FOMA; the preparation of educational resources.

The morning closed with more chat over coffee and biscuits.

If you would like to become a volunteer, please contact Norma Crowe at norma.crowe@medway.gov.uk or at the Medway Archives Office, Civic Centre, Strood, Rochester, Kent ME2 4AU; **telephone:** 01634 332714.

Photographs of the Volunteer Morning can be seen on page 2.

When the water receded after high tide, the dock slipped and was smashed to pieces on the side of the barge. Nearby at the Novadel chemical manufacturing plant, storerooms were flooded; raw materials and finished products were ruined.

As in Chatham, Strood and Rochester, pubs, with their extensive cellars, were particularly at risk. The cellar of the *White House* in Pier Road was inundated, and living accommodation flooded to a depth of three feet. Stephen Negus, the landlord was soon in the same position as his counterpart at the *Homeward Bound* in Rochester: "Soon after midnight, the water had reached the bottom of the garden. Two hours later it was in the house and all over Pier Road outside, completely isolating us. The water slowly crept in, doused the fires, floated the barrels in the cellar, which we had bunged tight after the warning, and cut off the electricity. By four o'clock, however, the water in the house had cleared, but the flood in the cellar had to be pumped out by firemen."

Lower Rainham

Having struck the riverside area of Gillingham, the abnormally high tide swept eastwards towards Rainham. The sea wall at Motney Hill was breached and the sewage works there was damaged and completely isolated for a time. In Motney Hill Road, the laboratory at Cathode Chemicals Ltd. suffered an explosion of hydrogen as cerium, a rare metallic element came into contact with the floodwater.

Several low-lying homes nearby flooded to a depth of four feet. The bungalow occupied by Lucyan Budzinski and his family was inundated by water several feet high. Brothers Ernest and Cecil Elwin, who lived further up the road, waded and swam to the Budzinskis' home. Cecil broke a window and Ernest climbed in. They emerged with four-year-old Christine and her mother on their backs.

Acres of low lying orchards were flooded, and at Otterham Quay a converted motor torpedo boat was smashed into a jetty and sank. Thankfully, the tidal wave narrowly missed the neighbouring caravan park. At Rainham, as in other parts of the area, the Royal Engineers were deployed to sandbag, and then permanently repair, the sea wall. In the weeks following the disaster, they saw service right along the north Kent coast from Greenhithe to Seasalter.

The Hoo Peninsula

Probably the only local fatality associated with the floods occurred when the brakes failed on a lorry loaded with sandbags on its way to Grain. The vehicle toppled on its side into a flooded ditch and a passenger drowned.

There were at least forty breaches of the sea wall between Allhallows and the nearly-completed oil refinery at Grain. While Grain village itself largely escaped flooding, a two-mile stretch of water cut across the peninsula, joining the Thames with the Medway and temporarily isolating Stoke, Grain and the refinery site. The latter was immersed to a depth of four feet, and there were fears that damage had been caused to

Chatham

At the western end of the High Street, the cellars at the Empire Theatre were flooded, together with those of many shops and houses. However, it was Medway Street and Military Road which suffered most; the floodwater came to within a few yards of the Town Hall steps.

The police had issued flood warnings to traders in Military Road on Saturday afternoon, but even so, there was insufficient time to secure all cellars and basements. Clothing worth £1,000 was ruined at the premises of W. Cooper (Hammersmith) Ltd.. The water also penetrated the safe, damaging clocks, pens and jewellery. Next door, the outfitters C.H. Bernard fared a little better, but at *The Eagle* pub, the landlord waded thigh-high in Military Road attempting to barricade his doors. The Fire Brigade still had to pump out his cellar. This was the eighth time in seven years *The Eagle* had been swamped, but definitely the worst.

Further up Military Road at the *Two Brothers*, landlord Fred Sullivan attempted to pump out his own cellar, but the underground drainage system collapsed and water cascaded in. As firemen pumped out the cellar of the Constitutional Club, live fish shot out of their hoses. In Medway Street, the *King's Arms*, Russell's Garage and the premises of the Unifit tailoring firm were all flooded. The offices and warehouse of Arthur Gamman were immersed and the doors of the cold storage depot were burst open by the force of the water. The bonded warehouse at Curtis Wharf was inundated, and bottles of whisky and gin bobbed their way down the river towards Gillingham.

Gillingham

In 1953, there were scores of houses on the north side of Pier Road adjacent to the river, and police visited homes on Saturday evening to warn residents of the tidal surge. However, this did not prevent the shock when water entered their homes. The experience of the Jackman family was typical. Mrs Jackman told the press: "We all stayed up that night, my husband, son, son-in-law and daughter. I went outside at about midnight and at that time the water had nearly reached the garden. We had put all the furniture on boxes, and took some upstairs. At 12.30 the water came into the house. It crept up the walls, putting out the fires, to a height of two feet."

A few doors from the Jackmans' house was Autoyachts Ltd., a newly-opened garage and marine engineering business. Bearing in mind its potentially vulnerable position, it had been built a few inches above the level of the previous highest tide. This saved the premises from serious damage, although they were still covered by an inch of water.

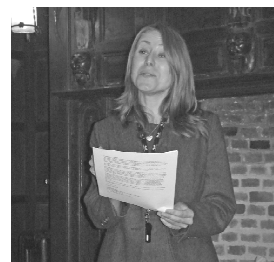
Next door, another marine engineering firm, W.C. Allen Ltd. of Bennet's Wharf, was badly affected. Mr Allen told a reporter: "A dozen boats which were standing high and dry on my wharf were lifted and carried into a path leading to the road." An expensive all-metal floating dock was lifted by the water onto a concrete barge.

The Eastgate House Heritage Lottery Fund Bid

Elaine Gardner



On 11th December 2012 the Friends of Eastgate received an invitation from Tracy Stringfellow, the Heritage Operations/Project Manager at Medway Council, to attend Eastgate House at 4pm. We all hoped it would be the news we wanted to hear! Even before she began speaking, Tracy's happy face told us it was (see photograph).



Eastgate House had been successful in its bid for Heritage Lottery Funding and the project had been granted the full amount requested, £1.28 million towards the total £2.1 million cost of the project. Fantastic news! Earlier in the day at a press conference announcing the award, Stuart McLeod, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund South East, said, "Today's Heritage Lottery Fund grant will not only conserve the important heritage fabric of the building itself but also help to transform Eastgate House into a multi-functional community space with vastly improved visitor facilities and access."

Certainly those of us from FOMA, City of Rochester Society, Eastgate Friends, U3A and others who have been manning exhibitions and opening events in Eastgate House for the last three years (in the not so ideal levels of heating and lighting!) are delighted that our contributions, along with Tracy's hard work, have helped towards the successful outcome. The plan is for work to begin during the summer, once a project manager is in place and architectural details have been finalised. The work will take two years and the opening is planned for 2015. Medway Council is contributing £700 000 to the total cost, which still leaves a further £129,000 to be raised...the Friends will be busy!

Tracy Stringfellow has offered to help The Friends of Eastgate House (FOEH) in a fundraising capacity over the coming months. The committee of FOEH would like to accept her offer but also wishes to recruit a willing Friend to work alongside her as this is going to be a major undertaking. If any Friend would like to get involved in fundraising please let us know!

The Galaxy Hot Chocolate Fund is inviting applications from community groups. Please follow the link below to vote for us in the Galaxy Hot Chocolate Fund People's Choice <http://www.hotgalaxywarmheart.com/fund/eastgate-house>



Representatives from groups such as FOMA were present at Eastgate House, Rochester, to hear the wonderful news. FOMA's Chairman, Tessa Towner is pictured in the centre wearing a light coloured jacket.

Chatham Dockyard and its Defences: an update on the future World Heritage Site.

Joanne Cable, Chatham World Heritage Manager

Joanne Cable has been Chatham World Heritage manager since 2007, and is responsible for the delivery of the World Heritage Site bid, and its many benefits. The most significant of these is the Great Lines Heritage Park. Prior to this, Joanne worked as European Network Co-ordinator for a Europe-wide collection of former naval and military towns, including the World Heritage Sites of Venice and Karlskrona, and the aspiring World Heritage Sites of Chatham, Rochefort and Cartagena. Born and raised in Medway, Joanne lives within the potential World Heritage Site village of Brompton.



You may recall that Chatham Dockyard and its defences applied last year to be the next UK nomination for World Heritage Site status (see *The Clock Tower*, Issue 22, May 2011). Government, however, chose to allocate the next two nomination dates to the Forth Bridge, in Scotland, and Gorham's Cave in Gibraltar. Chatham World Heritage was surprised and disappointed by the decision not to put Chatham forward at this stage, and a great number of residents and organisations share this sentiment. Despite this disappointment it is important to remember that Chatham remains on the government's tentative list - an acknowledgement of its world class heritage - and will have the opportunity to go forward at a later date. The report on our application acknowledged a great many strengths, in particular the engagement of the local community.

Low-lying land in the Medway estuary and valley from Sheppey to Aylesford and along the coast from Erith to Seasalter was badly affected. With no local radio, television in its infancy and domestic telephones rare phenomena, communications were poor. Most people in the Medway Towns were asleep when the storm surge swept in just before midnight on Saturday. Despite police warnings of the impending storm during the evening, many people were literally caught napping. Robert Bowman of Medway Street in Chatham told a local newspaper: "I first knew about the flood when I was awakened by the sound of rushing water outside the house. I hurried downstairs and managed to put the furniture at a higher level before the water started pouring in under the front door".

The low-lying areas of Chatham, Rochester and Strood, which had always been prone to flooding, were hit hard.

Strood

Most premises in Canal Road were affected. The water reached the top of the counter in Robert Duckworth's newsagent's shop. Next door, Harry Allen, who was sleeping downstairs, awoke with a start: "I put my foot out of the bed into deep water." He managed to struggle upstairs before the flood reached the mantelpiece. Water reached the top of the counter at the *Railway Tavern*, and the cellar of the *Three Gardeners* in North Street was flooded to a depth of six feet. Waves swept over the sea wall at Rochester Bridge, cascading into the Winget factory and along Strood High Street, which was submerged under three feet of water. Cars and coaches trying to enter Strood town centre from the London direction were stopped by the police at Gun Lane.

On the Monday morning, health inspectors visited the town centre's grocers' shops and condemned large quantities of food. Due to the continuation of some wartime rationing even as late as 1953, some of this was hard to come by at the best of times.

Rochester

The residents of the *Homeward Bound* pub in Gas House Road were roused by barking dogs. They were astonished to see the river surging through the premises of the Medway Steam Packet Company which lay opposite and then sweeping down the road. The pub was completely isolated and still accessible only by rowing boat on the Monday. The nearby Acorn Wharf offices of the Style and Winch mineral water factory were flooded to a depth of two feet. The Meux brewery stores at Old Foundry Wharf were inundated, with empty casks swept into the river, where they joined tons of timber planks already floating away.

The Mathematical School's cricket ground and the disused swimming baths on Rochester Esplanade were immersed, and flood water lapped as far as the Casino skating rink and then up Free School Lane and Blue Boar Lane. Half of the pupils of St Nicholas Girls' School were temporarily transferred to Delce Primary School due to flooded classrooms.

Available in the same series by Andrew Rootes are:

Volumes I and II of *Higham in Old Photographs* (£2.50 per copy)*

Volumes I and II of *A History of Higham* (£7.50 per copy).

*Vol. II is compiled by Andrew Rootes and Sue Williams.

Books are on sale in Higham Post Office. To order copies, email sue3906@googlemail.com giving your full name, postal address and telephone number indicating how many copies of each title you require. Costs, including postage, are dealt with on an individual basis.

A Clock Tower Special Feature

Saturday Night and Sunday Morning The Medway Towns and the East Coast Floods Of 1953

Brian Joyce



Brian Joyce is a retired teacher who lives and works in the Medway Towns. He was born in Chatham and has always been fascinated by the history of the area. Brian is the President of the Chatham Historical Society and the author of several books, including The Chatham Scandal, Dumb Show and Noise and Chatham and the Medway Towns, a History and Celebration. With Bruce Aubry, Brian co-wrote In the Thick of It-Medway Men and Women in the Boer War, which was published by their own Pocock Press. Brian is currently working on a similar volume which will examine the experiences of men and women from the Medway Towns during the First World War.

This year, the night of 31st January/1st February marked the sixtieth anniversary of one of the worst disasters to hit modern Britain in peacetime. A deep area of low pressure passed from the Atlantic into the North Sea, where it met a high spring tide. High winds caused a storm surge to race down the east coast, killing 19 people in Scotland and then ravaging low-lying English coastal counties from Lincolnshire to Kent.

Thirty thousand people had to be evacuated from their homes and 24,000 properties were severely damaged. In Canvey Island in Essex, which lies entirely below sea level, 58 people were drowned, many in their sleep. A further 37 died in Jaywick, a similar coastal community of cheaply-constructed bungalows. Although far less seriously affected than the Netherlands, where the floods killed nearly 2,000 people, the United Kingdom lost 300 to the storm that Saturday and Sunday.

Fortunately there were no fatalities directly caused by the floods in the Medway Towns, although there was widespread damage and disruption to the north Kent coast.

We have been clear from the outset that the benefits of applying for World Heritage Site status are significant, and this remains true. Over £2.5m has been secured for the Great Lines Heritage Park, and the parkland grounds of Fort Amherst have become a free-to-enter public park. 2012 saw the creation of a second new bridge crossing within Fort Amherst, commemorating the 200th anniversary of the establishment of the Royal School of Military Engineering in Medway, and several local projects have been supported by the Chatham World Heritage Partnership Fund. These are just some of the achievements made possible by the proposed World Heritage Site bid, and this must be borne in mind, despite current disappointment.

The second bridge within Fort Amherst.



All those involved are rightly proud of the heritage associated with Chatham Dockyard and its Defences, and the community groups and activities that have been formed around the World Heritage bid are of great benefit to the local area. The Chatham World Heritage Partnership will continue to be a vital part of our plans for a nomination. Please visit www.chathamworldheritage.co.uk to join the Partnership (free of charge) and show your support for Chatham's heritage!

There is an opportunity to bid for a future nomination date in autumn 2013, and the Chatham World Heritage team will be working hard towards this, as well as developing a multi-million pound bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for continued investment in the Great Lines Heritage Park.

Stop Press

As *The Clock Tower* was going to press, we were alerted by Joanne Cable about a public consultation event by the Fort Amherst Heritage Trust on 17 February (see www.fortamherst.com):

"...to seek the views of the local community regarding the Heritage Lottery Fund bid being developed by the Trust and Medway Council, to restore and bring back into use important areas of Fort Amherst and the Inner Lines. The value of the lottery bid is in

the region of £2,000,000 and would be the largest single investment to date in the restoration of Fort Amherst. The Trust and Medway Council are keen to hear the views of those living nearby or who have an interest in the project. The purpose of the consultation event is to gauge opinion and gather ideas on the future use of the areas involved, including possible activities and functions that could be held there."

The trust welcomes the contribution of ideas and these can be voiced at info@fortamherst.com; further information can also be obtained from Victoria Melhuish on 01634 847747, or via Victoria@fortamherst.com.

Heritage News

Sue Haydock

The latest from our roving reporter, Medway Heritage Champion and FOMA Vice President



On 26 November 2012, a ginkgo biloba tree* was planted in The Vines, Rochester by The Viscount De L'Isle MBE, Lord Lieutenant of Kent, representing Her Majesty the Queen. The tree was to commemorate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee and was one of 60 donated in the UK by the Tree Council. Tree Council Director-General Pauline Buchanan Black said, "These Jubilee Diamond Trees are intended to stand as a testament to the achievement of both monarch and people during the first 60 years of Her Majesty's reign. By planting trees, we are planting diamonds in the raw – with hope for the future as well as respect for the past." Indeed, the idea behind the scheme is that tree wardens working in parks such as The Vines should lead special planting events for Trees with Stories. Rochester's contribution will focus on Restoration House and the story of Charles II's stay there during his progress to London in 1660 and during the restoration of the monarchy following the Civil War.

Children from Year 6 from St. Margaret's School at Troy Town had been busy writing poems and prose about the tree and the commemorative royal event to read out at the ceremony. Their work will be bound into a book by the Tree Council and will be presented to The Queen on 2nd June 2013, on the occasion of the 60th Anniversary of the Coronation. The ceremony was attended by the Mayor of Medway, Cllr. Vaughan Hewett and his wife, the Mayoress, Mrs Jenifer Hewett, and FOMA's Bob Ratcliffe, who is also the Chairman of The Friends of The Vines group. I was delighted to have been at the ceremony, and also because when I was a Councillor I donated £2,000 of my ward improvement money for plants.

**The Ginkgo biloba is a living fossil, chosen for The Vines commemorative planting because of its excellent resilience to climate change. It is a unique species recognisably similar to fossils dating back 270 million years. Native to China, the tree is widely cultivated and*

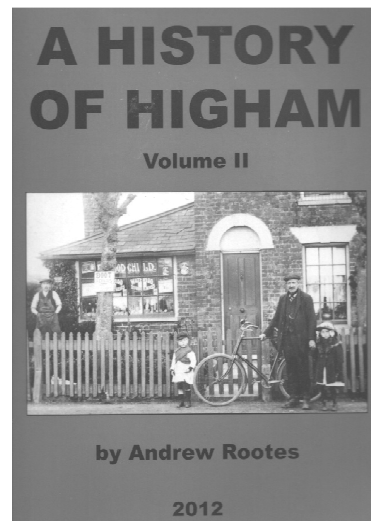
Magnum Opus

Cindy O'Halloran

A review of the latest Medway titles.



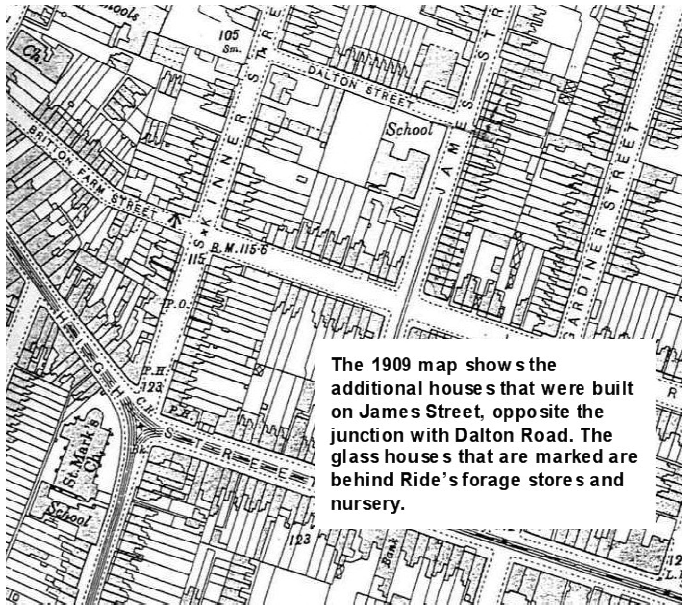
A History of Higham (Volume II)



The *A History of Higham Volume II* is another excellent and well-researched book from Andrew Rootes. Continuing on his tried and tested format of mixing local and family history, this book provides everything you wanted to know about Higham but may have been afraid to ask! The history of houses, farms, pubs and families in the area are all covered in both volumes in this series. Many illustrations are included, various garnered from local families and probably never published before. Andrew Rootes is to be highly commended for gathering this collection before memories and photographs of the village have been lost. It is also a lesson in how important local family collections and reminiscences are to local historians.

Topics covered include pubs, the railway, tradesmen and local businesses, farms, manors, religious houses, parish registers and a very interesting piece on the servants of Charles Dickens at Gad's Hill. This includes the story of Thompson, his valet who stole eight guineas from a cash box. Thompson knew of Dickens' affair with Ellen Ternan so he escaped a jail term and was set up in business by his master after turning down a job at the Reform Club as a waiter. He can be found on a later census return living at The Strand, London described as a *publisher*. His luck did not last, however, and by 1871 he was unemployed, living in Shoreditch. Another valet, Henry Scott, fared no better and was described as having "fallen on evil days." It seemed that working for Mr Dickens was not a passport to success. For those who know Higham well and for those who don't, I am sure there are many facts in this book not commonly known. This is the kind of publication you can dip into and enjoy the whole thing or peruse at your leisure.

Published by Mickle Print (Canterbury) Ltd £7.50 available from Higham Village History Group, <http://www.highamvillagehistory.org.uk>



Location map. 1909 OS map of Gillingham (sheet XIX:8); from the collections of the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre.

Notes

1. Although Ride's advertisement was actually placed during the Edwardian age, Alfred Ride was himself a Victorian, having been born in 1859.
2. Poultry farming 2013. *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*. Retrieved 16 January, 2013, from <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/1357351/poultry-farming>
3. *The Practical Poultry Keeper*. Lewis Wright. Cassell and Company Ltd., London, Paris, New York and Melbourne.
4. *The Chatham News*, 8 September 1900 p.3.
5. *The Times*, Friday, Jul 12, 1907; p. 4.
6. 1911 'GREEN CUT BONE'. *Examiner* (Launceston, Tas.: 1900 - 1954), 9 December, p.2 Edition: DAILY, viewed 17 January, 2013, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article50506130>
7. *Watermills and Windmills*. William Coles Finch. London 1933 p.245.
8. Ibid p.211. The 1871 census shows Joseph Ride, the miller from Milton, living at Walnut Tree Terrace in Gillingham so it is quite possible that J. Ride and Joseph Ride were one and the same.
9. Ride's Mill has since been reconstructed and can still be seen just off Sheerness High Street
10. *Chatham, Rochester and Gillingham Observer*, April 20 1928. 'Chatham makes History in 'Phone Development.'

was introduced early in human history. It has various uses as a food and in traditional medicine.



Children from St. Margaret's School, Troy Town, watch as The Viscount De L'Isle MBE, Lord Lieutenant of Kent, plants a ginkgo biloba tree in The Vines to commemorate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. To the right is the Mayor of Medway, Cllr. Vaughan Hewett and far right, FOMA's Bob Ratcliffe, who is also the Chairman of the Friends of The Vines group and President of the City of Rochester Society.

Keeping up with the Victorians

Alison Thomas

Archive and Local Studies Assistant, The Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre



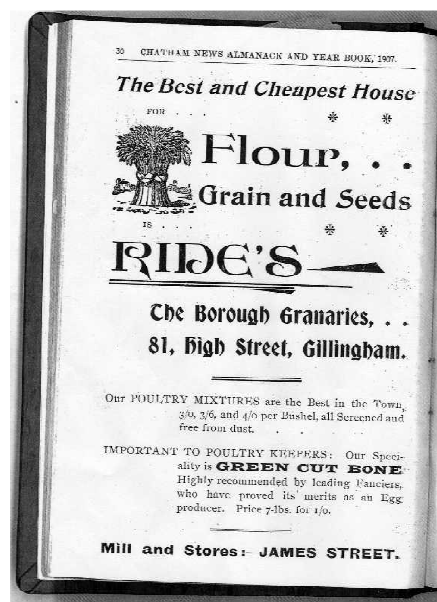
After completing a degree in medieval and modern history at the University of Birmingham, Alison Thomas trained as a teacher and worked in primary education for several years. Whilst bringing up her family she had various part time jobs within education ranging from playgroup assistant to special needs teacher. Alison left work to become a full time carer for four years, and joined MALSC as Archive and Local Studies Assistant at the end of February 2010.

Local Businesses through the Advertising of the Day

Alfred Ride – Developing a Family Business

This edition's local business owner is Gillingham's Alfred Ride. In the *Kelly's* directories of the late 19th and early 20th centuries he is variously described as 'corn and seed merchant', 'florist', and 'family miller'. He was also the owner of a forage

store, mill and a nursery. This advertisement that he placed in *The Chatham News Almanack and Year Book* of 1907 shows that he was taking advantage of a fashion that swept the Victorian world – chickens!¹



From The Chatham News Almanack and Year Book, 1907; the collections of the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre.

Chats about Chickens!

When cock fighting was outlawed in 1849 people began to show an interest in poultry farming for new reasons and from 1890 to 1920 an increasing emphasis was placed on meat and egg production. Chickens were also bred for the newly popular ‘poultry shows’.² Queen Victoria herself was a keen chicken fancier and kept her birds in a palatial poultry house at Windsor. *The Practical Poultry Keeper*, by Lewis Wright, originally published in 1867,³ aimed to give all those new to chicken keeping the myriad of skills necessary to succeed. It proved to be a real bestseller as it was reprinted 30 times in 3 different editions up to the

year 1904! Perhaps the Medway Towns were slower than some other areas to pick up on the benefits of poultry keeping. *The Chatham News* of September 1900 extolled the rural virtues of buying land on the Hempstead Farm Estate but lamented that more of those already resident had not yet chosen to enter into the profitable business of poultry keeping. The reporter concluded that, in various parts of the country, it had been proved over and over again that poultry could be made to pay.⁴ In 1907 the secretary of the National Poultry Conference was keen to stress to home producers the ‘inexhaustible demand for eggs and poultry of the best quality.’⁵ The ‘green cut bone’ advertised by Alfred Ride was fed to provide the protein and lime necessary for hens to produce strong eggs.⁶

The Family Miller

Ride’s advertisement of 1907 also shows him to be selling flour, grain and seeds – in keeping with the *Kelly’s* directories’ description of ‘corn and seed merchant’ and ‘family miller’. An examination of his family background shows that he certainly did come from a family of millers. Alfred’s grandfather, George, a miller for nearly 50 years, worked Mead’s Mill in Milton near Sittingbourne. After George’s death the mill passed to his eldest son, Joseph. William Coles-Finch in his book, *Watermills and Windmills*, says that in a storm in 1868 the

mill was badly damaged and Joseph, who was working on the mill at the time, was injured.⁷ He also says that a J. Ride was the miller at Friday’s Mill in Gillingham in 1878.⁸ Alfred’s father, John, was also a miller. John died when Alfred was just 11 years old and so the 1871 Census shows a young Alfred at his Uncle George’s house. George was the miller and corn factor at Ride’s Mill in Mile Town, Sheerness.⁹

Ride’s of Gillingham

Alfred Ride’s business as a corn merchant lasted from the 1880s until his death in 1925. The business subsequently became known as Ride’s Stores and eventually Ride and Winn. The entry in *Kelly’s Directory* for 1891/2 shows Alfred Ride, family miller and corn merchant at 77 High Street, New Brompton. These premises were on the corner of High Street and Canterbury Street in the spot now occupied by Barclays Bank. The extract from the 1898 map shows the position of his premises.

For a time in the late 19th Century the exchange office for the South of England Telephone Company also at 77 High Street. The operators who had originally worked in these exchange offices were eventually superseded by the opening of new automatic telephone exchanges. At the opening of the Chatham Automatic Telephone Exchange in 1928, the former operators were highly praised. Mrs Moore Brabazon said she “did not know how they managed to keep their tempers and remain unruffled.” She was also glad to hear “that the marriage rate in the telephone service was very high. This should be a lesson to ladies to keep in mind that a good temper and a nice voice were a great attraction...”¹⁰

By 1900 Ride’s had moved to 81 High Street with Alfred and his family living in nearby James Street at number 51, called Grenier Maison. The house is still there today – perhaps the most ornate abode on James Street. In subsequent years a mill, a nursery and forage stores were also variously listed at the same address in James Street. Today modern houses stand next to Grenier Maison emulating its style. It seems probable that they have been built where the mill, stores and nursery once stood. On the 1909 map the house and stores can be seen. It looks as if there were some glasshouses at the back of the stores - maybe to house the plants for Alfred’s nursery. At the height of his business Ride’s also had premises at 145 Canterbury Street for a short time, with Alfred himself living at number 399.

Alfred’s Obituary

Alfred’s obituary in the *Chatham News* of 27th March 1925 highlighted his interest in many other activities. He was a freemason, a member of the Gillingham Conservative Club and the Bowling Club. He also had connections with the old Court Leet and attended Gillingham Baptist tabernacle. Alfred was one of the subscribers to *Chats about Gillingham* (CS Leeds’ 1906 book about the history of Gillingham) so I am sure he would be delighted to know that his business now forms part of the history of the town.