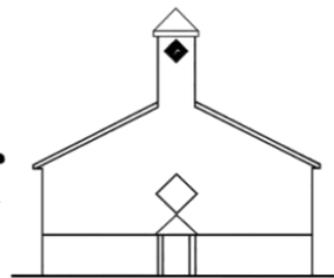


The Clock Tower



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Cindy's Retirement



FOMA Chairman, Elaine Gardner (left) presents Cindy O'Halloran with a bouquet from the Friends to mark her retirement at the party on 21 December organised by MAC staff - more on page 8. Photograph by Amanda Thomas.

ALSO INSIDE!

Brian Joyce on the young Charles Dickens' life in Chatham; see page 10.
Part One of the astonishing story of Chatham's Anglo-American Bookshop
by Chris de Coulon Berthoud; see page 24.

PLUS

On page 15 an update on the Restoration of Dickens' Chalet at Eastgate House,
AND George Atzev on Chatham House – the old Featherstones' store; see page 19.

Cindy's Retirement



At her party, Cindy opens the first of many special presents and cards.

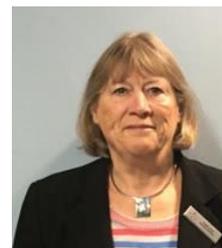
Duncan Mead (right), Medway Council Library Service Manager, helped give Cindy a special send-off with a speech of thanks, which included a career retrospective and some amusing anecdotes. For more see page 8.

Photographs, Amanda Thomas; photograph below, Nikki Pratt.



Chairman's Letter

Elaine Gardner



It's probably a bit late into the year to wish you a happy new year, but I hope that 2023 will be a good year for you, whatever you may have planned.

At the end of last year, just before Christmas, many of us attended a retirement party for MAC's Senior Archives and Local Studies Assistant, Cindy O'Halloran (see page 8). It was sad to be saying goodbye to Cindy after her many years' service. She was always full of helpful suggestions and her local knowledge was extensive, which I know will be missed. It was also lovely to see such a good turnout for her leaving party. You will see on the back cover that Elspeth Millar, Stephen Dixon and Alison Cable were all there, but everyone to do with Medway heritage also attended, plus – of course - a large number of FOMA members. I think we gave her a pretty good send-off, but as Cindy is a FOMA member, I am sure we will be seeing a lot more of her.

With both Cindy and Elspeth Millar leaving before Christmas the staff at MAC are shorthanded. Let's hope that the council replace both as soon as possible.

There are a lot of interesting events planned at the Medway Archive Centre over the coming months so do read the circulated email information Amanda Thomas passes on from Helen Worthy, and which is also featured in *News and Events* on page 35. The forthcoming series of talks looks both interesting and varied and the first is on the afternoon of Tuesday 28 February; this will have already taken place by the time you receive this issue of *The Clock Tower*. The talk, *Islands of the Medway Estuary* by Adam Taylor has been jointly run between MAC and FOMA, which has been particularly helpful to us as FOMA's usual venue of St Nicholas Church Hall is temporarily out of service due to refurbishment. Adam Taylor's talk on the many islands and forts in the Medway estuary sounds intriguing, but the other topics sound equally promising and I was planning to go to all of them, though when putting them in my diary I realised I shall miss Deborah Collins' *Drunkness, Madness and Bigamy - the staff of Strood Workhouse* as I am away that day! The series concludes on 4 July with a talk by FOMA's Dr Alexander Thomas entitled, *The Fake Peace within the 'Textus Roffensis'*. To save complications with pricing, we will be keeping in line with MAC and charging £4 for all the talks. However, please don't forget that if you plan on attending the full series, you can buy a season ticket for £20, in other words six talks for the price of five! In addition to all of this, MAC is also continuing its themed one-day exhibitions on the first Saturday of the month, so do watch out for those.

You may be aware that the February issue of *The Clock Tower* is usually the one in which we include details of the forthcoming AGM and the leaflet for that event. At its last meeting, the FOMA Committee decided that we would in future save the increased costs of postage, and printing by instead making the AGM leaflet available online and emailing members an easy to read, downloadable version. Almost all our members now receive FOMA communications by email, but if you are reading this and do not have that facility, please contact me (see page 40 for details) and we can supply you with a paper copy.

Our AGM is on 14 April (see page 35) and, as indicated in the last *The Clock Tower* we will be putting an increase in membership fees to the AGM for members' approval, as indicated in the society's rules. If you have particular views we would welcome hearing them, so please do come along.

Finally, now that things are finally getting back to normal, we have a number of talks in the pipeline so watch out for details on these in the near future. Dates and venue will be on the website and Facebook page and also emailed out to you, so keep a look out for these.

New Members

A warm welcome to new FOMA member Mrs Elizabeth Yates of Melbourne, Australia.

FOMA COMMITTEE VACANCY

Could you spare a few hours a month to help FOMA?

Jean Skilling is sadly standing down as FOMA Treasurer and we need a replacement!

Only basic accounting skills are needed and Jean will provide help and advice if necessary. There are only six committee meetings a year and a willingness to help at FOMA events is appreciated!

If this is you, then please contact Jean for more information at treasurer@foma-lsc.org

Medway Council's Make a Difference Awards

The Make a Difference Awards are awarded by Medway Council to celebrate the successes, hard work and commitment of those working for the organisation. In 2022 there were ten categories for which employees or teams could be nominated for.

We are delighted to announce that the Medway Archives Centre was recently awarded a Highly Commended certificate in Team of the Year category. The certificate can be seen on the inside back cover, and by way of congratulations, Richard Hicks, Medway's Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive, wrote the following to the MAC team:

'I would like to thank you for your dedication and commitment over the last year. As you know, I was immensely proud when we achieved National Archive Service Accreditation, and this is testament to the outstanding service you provide to our users. Heritage is a huge part of our placemaking agenda and the services you provide are critical in documenting not just past events, but those present which will be reviewed in future years.'

Introducing Emma Ovenden

Amanda Thomas

If you have visited the Medway Archives Centre recently, you may have noticed a new addition to the team. We are delighted to introduce MAC's new Librarian, Emma Ovenden, and who, incidentally, is already a FOMA member! *Clock Tower* Editor, Amanda Thomas asked Emma to tell us a little bit more about herself and her background.

'I was born and raised in Gravesend, where I still live. I moved away from the area while I studied and have a BA (Hons) degree in Film, Media and Culture from Brunel University. I took a year's post-graduate placement working in the Readers Services department at HM Treasury and Cabinet Office Library in London, before completing my Postgraduate Diploma in Information Management from Thames Valley University (the old Ealing Library School!) in 1998.

My first professional role after qualifying was as a temporary Information Team Librarian at Gillingham Reference Library, covering maternity leave. From there I moved to work at Chatham Reference Library, overseeing the European Information Centre and running the Local Government Information Service. I worked towards chartership during this time and became a Chartered Member of CILIP (the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals) in 2001.



In 2004 I became Development Librarian, a role which covered marketing, performance information and staff training for the service. I took a break in 2008, later volunteering at Rochester Cathedral Library. It was a joy to be part of the team that prepared the library for its move to Kent Archives during the refurbishment works.

From 2014 I worked as Parish Administrator at St Stephen's Church in Chatham, and returned to Medway Libraries and Archives Service on a part time basis in the role of Library and Archives Development Officer in 2018. I left my role at St Stephen's to join MAC as the Librarian in late July 2022. The role has responsibility for the local studies stock, with a particular focus on outreach and collections management. I have worked with local studies before, at both Gillingham and Chatham libraries, and am enjoying learning about the collections in more depth. You'll find me at MAC on Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and some Saturdays. I continue to work as Library and Archives Development Officer on Thursdays and Fridays.

Throughout my career I have been blessed to work with many friendly colleagues who have freely shared their knowledge and skills – and I'm delighted this is also true of the MAC staff, they are a wonderful team and I've been made to feel very welcome!

Medway Archives Centre Report

Helen Worthy, Archives and Local Studies Assistant.



Hello everyone! We have had a busy time at Medway Archives Centre since Elspeth Millar's last update. The following is just a brief overview, so please do get in touch if you'd like to know more about the collections at Medway Archives Centre, our events and exhibitions, or about the services we offer.

Staffing

Elspeth Millar left on the 22 November 2022 to take up the post of Digital Archivist at the BT Archives. She was a wonderful colleague and we were very sorry to see her go. We all wish her the very best in her new post.

Cindy O'Halloran took retirement at the end of December 2022. We would like to thank all the FOMA members who came to wish her goodbye at her retirement party – Cindy was very appreciative of everyone's good wishes and gifts, and she thanks everyone for making her send-off so enjoyable – you can read more about the party on page 8. She too will be greatly missed.

We are endeavouring to run the service as normal although we are limiting archive appointments to Tuesdays and Fridays (visits to the Local Studies searchroom will continue as usual). Please direct any enquiries to Emma Ovenden (MAC Librarian) or Helen Worthy (Senior Archives Assistant).

Events and exhibitions

Since the last *Clock Tower* we have had a number of great exhibitions and events:

- Our Medway in Print exhibition is on loan to Hempstead Library
- Our Twydall exhibition was installed in the foyer at MAC and will return (by popular demand) to Twydall Library
- November Saturday drop-in session: *Theatres, Cinemas and Amateur Dramatics*
- December Saturday drop-in session: *Posters*
- Drop-in Christmas art activity

Outreach

Emma Ovenden has run education sessions for three classes at Gordon Road School in Strood with former colleague Norma Crowe, supported by MAC Assistants Alison Thomas and Nikki Pratt. The excellent feedback we received from the teachers and pupils illustrates how important these sessions are to the local community, both in encouraging young children to appreciate the history of their local area, and in promoting the collections and services offered by MAC.

Other Projects

Some months ago, Cllr Howard Doe, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services, suggested MAC undertake an Oral History of Local Government in Medway. As far as we are aware this is the first oral history project concerned with local government that has taken place in the UK. Cllr Doe kindly volunteered to be the first participant and Elspeth interviewed him on Monday 14 November. Emma sat in on this interview as she is now leading the project. It is hoped a number of people who have extensive local government experience in Medway (and its predecessor authorities) will agree to be interviewed as part of the project.

Future Events and Exhibitions

We are pleased to announce our Spring Lecture Series 2023. Tickets are £4 per lecture, or £20 for the whole series of six lectures. Please contact us for more information or if you would like to attend. You will see plenty of publicity in the coming months, but a summary can be found in the *News and Events* section on page 36.

We are also looking forward to our next exhibition entitled, *Coming out of Covid* by Shea Coffey of Medway Pride Radio. This exhibition looks at the history of the radio station. Shea will also be broadcasting live from MAC on Wednesday 1 February.

Plans for 2023 include a children's art display and an exhibition on the ship-building industry. We are also continuing our popular Saturday drop-in sessions, organising several events to mark the Coronation of King Charles III, and offering more children's craft activities. More details to come!

Volunteers

Our wonderful team of volunteers continues to support us. Current projects include listing archive and local studies collections, researching historic properties and helping at our events. We have paused taking on any additional volunteers until we have a new archivist in place.

Collections Care Fortnight

At the time of writing, we have just come to the end of our temporary closure for our Collections Care Fortnight, and we thought you might be interested to know what we have been up to. This year we have worked on tasks that cannot be done whilst open to the public, and these have included:

- Embarking upon a stocktake and clean of the Naval Collection in preparation for future events to mark the 40th anniversary of the closure of Chatham Dockyard
- A reorganisation of our ephemera collection
- Work on a listing of uncatalogued Gillingham Borough Council documents
- Processing and cataloguing new book stock
- Beginning the move into new office space
- Staff training in Emergency Evacuation Procedures
- Staff training in Emergency First Aid at Work

Recent Material Donated to Medway Archives Centre

- Acc1561: Additional deposit of papers relating to Owlett's, Cobham
- Acc1564: Allhallows Oral History Project
- Acc1565: Oral history project of Local Government in Medway conducted by MAC staff
- Acc1566: Cuxton and Halling parish magazines
- Acc1568: Indenture c.1500 for the White Hart Inn and other land in Rochester
- Acc1569: Tickets for the Watts Charity Poor Travellers House dated 1773 and 1849

Recent Local Studies acquisitions include:

The kids are all square: Medway Punk and Beyond (1977-85) by Bob Collins and Ian Snowball. This book tells the story of the Medway music scene from the end of the 1970s and early 1980s, charting the bands, the fans and the venues that made the Medway Towns a unique place at a unique time.

Snodland Football before the First World War by Ian Lambert

This book looks in detail at three local clubs which existed before the First World War, one of which was a founder member of the Maidstone and District Football League in 1893. There were also periods in the Chatham and District League and the Kent League. A further eleven Snodland based teams are also identified. The footballing details give an insight into village life during this period and photographs of both teams and local scenes are included.

Do get in touch if you would like to view any of these items. Please note that occasionally new acquisitions are temporarily unavailable whilst documents are listed, cleaned and stored.

Cindy O'Halloran's Retirement

Medway Archives Centre Staff

It was with a heavy heart that we all said a fond farewell to Cindy at her retirement party on 21 December 2022. There can be few of us who remember Medway Archives Centre without her, and most customers will have benefitted from her extensive knowledge of the collections together with her enthusiasm for local and family history. Thank you to everyone who sent messages and contributions, as well as those who joined us in making sure she had a fun and lively send off.

Cindy began work at Luton Library in 1991 as a Saturday Assistant, juggling library work with working as a Teaching Assistant at All Saints Primary School in Chatham. Within a couple of years, she had increased her hours at the library and become a school governor at Luton Junior School. Always able to tell a good story, we have all enjoyed her anecdotes of life in Luton Library and she made lifelong friends amongst her colleagues.

In 2003 Cindy began work at Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre (MALSC), a time before the internet when most family history research was conducted at the centre using index cards, microfiche and the original parish registers; some years the centre had 10,000 visitors. However, the busiest day ever (and the worst) was the day after the first episode of the family history series, *Who Do You Think You Are?* first aired on television.* Staff at MALSC opened the doors to discover customers queuing down the stairs and into the car park!



Cindy O'Halloran.

Roll forwards nearly 20 years, and Cindy has worked with three archivists (Stephen Dixon, Alison Cable and Elspeth Millar – see page 42) as well as numerous librarians and assistants. She has been a steady and kind manager, with a mischievous sense of fun but able to be firm when needed. We are missing her already, and hope she may return after a well-deserved rest – as a volunteer perhaps? Take care of yourself, Cindy, and enjoy time with your family and friends. When you're ready, we look forward to spending time with you at MAC (and in Peggotty's in Rochester too!)

*Editor's Note

The first episode of *Who Do You Think You Are?* was broadcast on BBC2 on 12 October 2004 featured the story of writer and comedian, Bill Odie. The first two series of *Who Do You Think You Are?* were broadcast on BBC2 before transferring to BBC1. In the first series, much was made of the fact that you could easily trace your own family tree, with broadcaster Adrian Chiles and genealogist Nick Barrett giving advice on how to go about it at the end of each programme.

Cindy's Retirement Party

Amanda Thomas

Plans for Cindy's retirement party started quite a few weeks before and the FOMA Committee was delighted to be involved in its planning, particularly when I was asked to send out a secret message to FOMA members inviting them to attend. The difficulty with this is that Cindy is also a FOMA member and so had to be taken off the circulation list and then reinstated once the email to members had gone out! It has to be said that on the day of the party, absolutely everyone was there who had played a part in Cindy's rich and varied career; those for whom it was impossible to attend had sent messages.

Staff at MAC had compiled a special scrapbook for Cindy which contained memories, photographs and messages, including a contribution from FOMA. MAC also organised a collection which must have reached a substantial sum, given the gorgeous array of presents presented to Cindy (photographed). These included a small bronze statue of a mouse on a stack of four books (which Cindy was particularly delighted with), a voucher for a fancy afternoon tea for two, and a Marks and Spencer gift voucher. Gifts were also left by guests as they arrived and these included a beautiful plant, and bottles of booze, including champagne. Elaine Gardner, FOMA Chairman also presented Cindy with some flowers (as on the front cover), and Life Membership of FOMA.



*Cindy's presents;
photograph Nikki Pratt.*

It was a wonderful send-off, and we all knew it was not goodbye!



The first photograph of Cindy published in The Clock Tower, (Issue 2, June 2006). This was taken at the FOMA Inaugural Annual General Meeting in 2006. From left to right (and with their 2006 titles): Stephen Dixon, Borough Archivist, Amanda Thomas, The Clock Tower Editor, Cllr Sue Haydock, Vice-President and Medway Council Representative to FOMA, Norma Crowe, Local Studies Librarian, Cindy O'Halloran, FOMA Secretary. In May 2009, Cindy stood down from the FOMA Committee, but she continued to work closely with the Friends and remained a prolific contributor to The Clock Tower.

The Best of Times
Young Charles Dickens in Chatham

Brian Joyce



Brian Joyce is the author of several books on the history of the Medway Towns, including The Chatham Scandal and Dumb Show and Noise. He is a past President of the Chatham Historical Society and was on the FOMA Committee. Brian was born in Chatham and continues to take a great interest in the history of the Towns, however, he now lives in Tyldesley in Greater Manchester. Since moving to the North West in 2014, he has contributed articles to many journals specialising in the history of his new local area.

Charles Dickens famously found inspiration in Rochester, and its streets and buildings feature prominently in his novels, albeit under other names. Because of this, there appears to be a widespread assumption that the author lived in the city. Indeed, since moving to Greater Manchester, I have had to enlighten several people on this point, informing them that Gad's Hill Place is three miles outside Rochester. However, between April 1817 and the summer of 1822, the future novelist gained inspiration in a town in which he actually resided – Chatham.

Dickens was born in 1812 just outside Portsmouth; his father was a clerk in the Navy Pay Office there. After a few years in London, the Dickens family moved to Sheerness, where John Dickens paid naval personnel and Dockyard workers. After three months or so, Dickens senior was transferred to Chatham, where the family spent the next five years. The rented house into which the family moved was numbered 2 Ordnance Terrace. At the time, the newly-built row consisted of four houses, with a fifth added by 1820. The street has since been extended and renumbered, so the Dickens's house is now numbered eleven.

VALUABLE FREEHOLD ESTATES.
LAND TAX REDEEMED.
TO BE SOLD BY AUCTION,
By Mr. T. WILKINSON.

ON THURSDAY, April 10, 1817, at the MITRE TAVERN, Chatham, between the hours of six and eight o'clock in the evening, (subject to such conditions as will be then and there produced.)

All that valuable brick built DWELLING HOUSE, with yard and garden, beautifully situated at Ordnance Place, fronting the road to Fort Pitt, commanding beautiful views of the surrounding country; and fit for the residence of a genteel family.

Together with all those four brick built DWELLING HOUSES, near the same, called Union Place, with five other Dwelling Houses, part fronting Fort Pitt-street, the whole of which are let to respectable tenants at will, and may be viewed any time previous to the Sale by leave of the Tenants, and Particulars known by application to the AUCTIONEER, St. Margaret's Bank, Rochester.

An advertisement for the auction of the newly built houses at Ordnance Terrace, Chatham.



2 Ordnance Terrace.

Ordnance Terrace was built on land formerly part of Rome Lane Farm, a property belonging to Watts Charity, and the row was on high ground outside the centre of Chatham. Open fields sloped down from the front of the house towards the brick-built archway that led into the town. Thirty or so years after Dickens left Chatham, the town's railway station, with its associated cutting, bisected and scarred what the novelist had described as, 'the most airy and pleasant part of the parish.'

The house was single-fronted and fairly modest, although it was built on three floors and contained a basement. A narrow hallway led into a reception room which overlooked the fields leading down to the town. The family's parlour and the bedroom of Dickens' parents were above and there were two further bedrooms on the top floor. The basement consisted of a kitchen and the quarters of Mary Weller and Jane Bonny, the family's two servants.

The house in Ordnance Terrace provided the young Charles with a base from which he, accompanied by Mary Weller or his parents, explored Chatham, Rochester and the surrounding countryside. The precocious young lad drank in the sights and sounds he would draw upon later in life. He even used Mary Weller's surname for Mr Pickwick's servant Sam and had him marry a girl named Mary.

The Stroughill family who lived next door also provided Dickens with inspiration, both directly and indirectly. William Stroughill was a plumber and glazier who was later responsible for building new houses further up Ordnance Terrace. William's son George, a little older than Dickens, probably provided the template for David Copperfield's loyal and upright friend Steerforth. Contemporaries of Dickens also remarked that little Lucy Stroughill was the author's childhood sweetheart.

The Dickens and Stroughill children put on shows for the adults and had joint parties. They were often joined by the offspring of John Tribe, a family friend who was the landlord of Chatham High Street's Mitre Inn. Indeed, Tribe's son later claimed to remember young Dickens and his sister Fanny standing on a table at the Mitre singing a duet. Dickens wrote of the Mitre in *Household Words* in 1855:

‘There was an Inn in the cathedral town where I went to school It had an ecclesiastic sign – the Mitre – and a bar that seemed to be the next best thing to a bishopric it was so snug. I loved the Landlord’s youngest daughter to distraction, but let that pass. It was in this Inn that I was cried over by my rosy little sister because I had acquired a black eye in a fight.’

Another Ordnance Terrace family that the novelist drew upon later in life was that of the comfortably-off retired tailor, Richard Newnham. A sign of how close the families were is that both Newnham and his widow Mary Ellen left money to the Dickens sisters in their wills. In fact, Dickens used Mary Ellen Newnham as the model for ‘The Old Lady’ in *Sketches by Boz* in 1835. He described her Ordnance Terrace residence as ‘a picture of quiet neatness’ and described its carefully arranged ornaments and beeswaxed table. Long after the Dickens family had left Chatham, John named his youngest son Augustus Newnham Dickens. The same edition contained a sketch inspired by yet another Ordnance Terrace resident – Duncan Calder, a retired naval officer. Like Calder himself, the ‘Half Pay Captain’ spent much of his time sitting in his front garden, looking out over the fields towards the town and the Dockyard beyond. The fictional officer, like Calder was often in dispute with the parochial authorities.

When Dickens was six years old, his parents sent him to a Dame School in Rome Lane (today’s Railway Street), a short walk away down the hill towards Chatham. When attempting to recall the school some years later, he seemed to remember that it had been above a dyer’s shop and that it was ‘ . . . under the early domination of an old lady who to my mind ruled the world with the birch.’ He also remembered a dog snapping at the children as they entered. The animal belonged to a woman ‘chiefly inhabiting a back parlour, whose life appeared to us to have been consumed in sniffing and in wearing a brown beaver bonnet.’

After about three years at the Dame School, Charles transferred to Giles Academy on the corner of Rhode and Best Streets. This was run by William Giles, the son of a Baptist minister based in Providence Chapel on The Brook and a friend of the family. Soon after Charles transferred to Giles Academy, the Dickens family moved from Ordnance Terrace. This appears to have been forced on John Dickens due to lack of funds. Although he was earning £441 per annum at the Dockyard, the rent was relatively high and he had to keep a growing family and two servants. He also appears not to have stinted on parties, theatre visits and other entertainments. This apparent profligacy caused John to take out loans, the repayments for which he could not manage. His brother-in-law Thomas Barrow bailed him out, but John failed to repay this generosity. It is hardly surprising that Charles Dickens probably used his father’s example as inspiration for the character of Wilkins Macawber in *Great Expectations*. The new address of the Dickens family was 18 St Mary’s Place on The Brook. This house was adjacent to Providence Chapel, and it was probably the schoolmaster William Giles or his Baptist minister father who organised the move.



An image of the school run by William Giles.

Providence Chapel.



18, St Mary's Place, The Brook.

Leaving Ordnance Terrace was literally a downwards move. The Dickens family home was no longer perched on a hill well away from the crowded and polluted town centre, but right at its heart. It should be noted, though, that The Brook had not yet gained its notorious reputation. Other parts of Chatham such as Red Cat Lane near the Royal Marine Barracks, and the riverside Holborn Lane area were much more infamous and retained their notoriety until demolished decades later. The rent for 18 St Mary's Place was no doubt less than that of Ordnance Terrace, but probably not considerably. The family's servant, Mary Weller, described the house to John Forster, Charles Dickens's friend and early biographer. According to Mary, the house consisted of six rooms on three storeys with six steps up to the front door. The latter was just as well, because a combination of inadequate drainage and torrents of rainwater cascading down from the Great Lines often caused The Brook to flood. The family's new home had gardens in front and at the back, which was a boon to the children who lived there in addition to three adult family members and the two servants.

Dickens later recalled a few things in particular about this house. One of the fire surrounds contained Bible illustrations, which he drew upon when describing Ebenezer Scrooge's quarters in *A Christmas Carol*. Dickens also lost himself in his father's collection of books, which was kept in an upstairs room and contained *Tom Jones*, *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Vicar of Wakefield* among others. The author referred to the contents of this refuge in *David Copperfield* and wrote that, 'they were a glorious host to keep me company. They kept alive my fancy and my hope of something beyond that time and place.'

Although Dickens only spent about five years in Chatham, it was during a formative period of his life, and the future author absorbed, and later used, the sights, squalor and people he witnessed. John Forster called the town, 'The birthplace of his fancy'. Dickens and his parents frequently went on long walks throughout what was later called the Medway Towns. The author later summarised his overall impressions: 'The principal production of these towns appear to be soldiers, sailors, Jews, chalk, shrimps, officers and dockyardmen The streets present an animated appearance occasioned chiefly by the conviviality of the military' He had sometimes accompanied his father on board the Navy Pay Yacht which plied between Chatham and Sheerness Dockyards. This was before the days of iron hulls and the expansion of the Chatham Yard on to St Mary's Island. In later life, he remembered it as '... under hillsides of fine cornfields, hop gardens and orchards, its great chimneys smoking with a quiet, almost a lazy air, like a giant smoking tobacco.' In addition, Dockyard workers often took away raw materials when they could. Dickens wrote: 'Nails and copper are shipwright's sweethearts, and shipwrights will run away with them whenever they can.'

The young Dickens had lived in Chatham shortly after the end of the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815), when Dockyard workers were laid off and returning soldiers faced destitution. The impressionable and imaginative boy therefore witnessed poverty and squalor at first hand. He was also familiar with the convict ships moored in the River Medway, and observed their inmates forced to work on the roads. The convict Magwitch in *Great Expectations* was a product of the author's experience as well as imagination.

The Dickens family lived on The Brook for approximately twelve months, for in June 1822, the Admiralty recalled John Dickens to London. After selling some of their household possessions, John shipped the rest to London by water. He offered Mary Weller a job in their new home, but the servant was engaged to Thomas Gibson, a shipwright so stayed in Chatham. The young Charles also remained in the town for a few more months, lodging with his schoolmaster William Giles in Rhode Street. Opinions differ as to why: perhaps the delicate young man was unwell, or the family wished to establish themselves in London before sending for him. Completing his education with Giles would also have been a priority. Either way, it was not until August or September that he took The Commodore coach to London from Simpson's office in Chatham High Street.

Chatham changed considerably in the years following Dickens' departure, particularly with the arrival of the East Kent Railway in the late 1850s. The author referred to his observations after a return visit to Ordnance Terrace a short time later. The gentle slopes down which Dickens had walked to his Dame School had been transformed, and he wrote in *The Uncommercial Traveller* in 1861:

'I began to look about me, and the first discovery I made was that the station had swallowed up the playing field. It was gone. The two beautiful hawthorn trees, the hedge, the turf and all those buttercups and daisies had given place to the stoniest of jolting roads, while beyond the station, an ugly dark monster of a tunnel kept its jaws open as if it had swallowed them and was ravenous for more destruction.'

It was perhaps on this visit, or possibly before or after one of his readings at the Lecture Hall in Chatham High Street, that Dickens was one of a large group who ate at the Red Lion at the corner of Military Road. Dickens reportedly told a fellow diner how happy he had been during his time living on The Brook.

However, things change, for by the time of its demolition in 1941, 18 St Mary's Place had fallen victim to the relative decline of The Brook and had been absorbed into an adjoining lodging house. The Ordnance Terrace property lingered on and in October 1969, the *Chatham News* claimed that it had become a haunt for 'drop-outs' and drug addicts. There followed a tussle throughout the 1970s between councillors who wished to demolish it and those who advocated creating a Dickensian museum in the building. In 1980 a lively debate in the correspondence columns of the *Chatham News* ensued. By 1982, the museum idea was dead and the house was reportedly being used by prostitutes. In July, it was up for auction and Chatham Council was outbid by a private buyer.

John Forster, Dickens's friend and biographer wrote of the Ordnance Terrace house: 'Here it was that his first desire for knowledge and his greatest passion for reading was awakened ...' And as Claire Tomalin, a more recent biographer has pointed out, the house still stands, although 'battered by time and neglect.' Tomalin also recognised that 'Dickens looked back on the years in Chatham as the idyll of his life'.

It would seem that if Dickens fondly remembered Chatham, the town forgot him, and left the flourishing Dickensian tourist industry to Rochester.

Illustrations from the author's collection.

The Restoration of Dickens' Chalet ...

The Next Chapter

Rachel Kerr,
Project Coordinator, Medway Council Tourism and Heritage Service



Originally from Eltham, Rachel made Rochester home in 2002. With a history degree and a postgraduate diploma in Museum Studies, she has worked in the cultural heritage sector since the mid-1990s. After a decade as a policy adviser for the Council for Museums Libraries and Archives, Rachel gained a PGCE and joined Medway Council in 2014. While in post, she has secured funding from both HLF and Royal Opera House Bridge to run education projects across Medway, including the reinterpretation of Temple Manor, undertaken in partnership with Strood Academy.

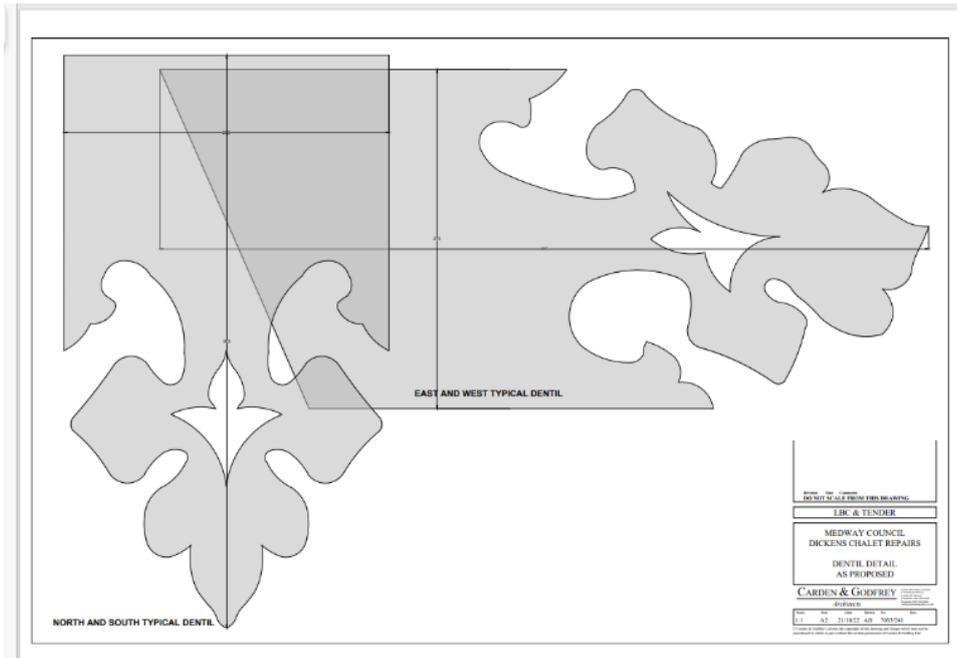


In the last issue of The Clock Tower (number 68, November 2022), FOMA Vice President, Sue Haydock (pictured) gave some background to Dickens' Swiss Chalet (illustrated) which is situated in the gardens of Rochester's Eastgate House, and how a fund for its restoration has been established (see [dickensfellowship.org](https://www.dickensfellowship.org) and <https://www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/Chalet>).

Here Medway Council's Rachel Kerr takes up the story.

The project to restore the Dickens Chalet has reached a pivotal moment, making it timely to reach out to the Friends of Medway Archives, in the hope you will want to lend a supportive arm as we press ahead. In the last edition of *The Clock Tower*, Sue Haydock focused on the chalet and reminded us how it was gifted to Dickens by an actor friend in 1864 and used as a summer writing study. It ultimately came to reside in Eastgate Gardens, having been disassembled and re-erected three or four times along the way.¹ The Ikea flat pack of its day was not conceived as a permanent structure.

Albeit extremely attractive, with its intricate dentils (as in the image below) and evocative shutters, it is by dint of its association with Charles Dickens that the chalet gained its Grade I status, rather than any intrinsic architectural merit. Nevertheless, our top listing comes with the expectation that we diligently conserve and preserve this beloved soft wood structure.



Following an inspection and report by structural engineers Adrian Cox Associates (ACA), the most urgent repairs were completed in 2021. These included replacing missing ridge tiles, preventative woodworm treatment, and other minor interventions. ACA also reassured that the brace (in place since 2009) has halted any deterioration in the angle at which the chalet leans. With the chalet stable and watertight, planning a full programme of repair and conservation is well under way.



The Dickens' Chalet and Eastgate Gardens lit up for Light Nights in February 2022.

Besides discharging our stewardship responsibilities, the council and local stakeholders want to see the chalet play a lead role at the heart of a vibrant Eastgate cultural hub. A fully restored chalet could be a fabulous backdrop for a wide range of cultural and community events, a focus for educational activities, and a stimulus for creativity. Dickens' life and writings are content-rich and thought-provoking, a limitless source of inspiration for young and old learners alike. A rejuvenated chalet would be an asset to draw on extensively and variously. A credible, compelling focus for grant applications, it could lever funding and tourists into Medway.



Nick Baines, Chairman of the local Dickens Fellowship, seeing in the new information and fundraising sign in 2022.

The funding to restore the chalet is still to be assembled. Whilst acknowledging the challenges facing this project, a lot has been achieved over the last two years. A supportive partnership of stakeholders representing local groups² has lent strength, ideas, and encouragement. In consultation with this consortium, and a close partnership with Matthew Newton (Medway's Senior Conservation Officer), an expert team has been diagnosing the chalet's issues and prescribing the remedies.



The team working with us comprises (from left to right in the photograph), conservation architect Andy Burrell of Carden and Godfrey, structural engineer Adrian Cox, of Adrian Cox Associates, and carpenter/timber specialist Julian Ladbrook of McCurdy and Co.. All three welcomed the opportunity to work collaboratively. Their interdisciplinary approach has resulted in a compelling set of drawings and a highly specified schedule of work.³

The plans and drawings of the chalet will form the basis of an application for Listed Building Consent (LBC). This is needed because the changes we propose go beyond like-for-like repairs. All stakeholders agree that to harness the full potential of the chalet, its balcony must be brought back into commission. This means strengthening and adding a discrete additional handrail. These modifications are essential if visitors are to be allowed to enjoy the views over Eastgate House gardens once more.⁴





A proposed change, which would take the chalet closer to how it looked in Dickens' day, is the solution to some of our balcony-related health and safety concerns. The pictures below show the chalet in the grounds of Cobham Hall and the balcony as it currently stands in Eastgate Gardens. Spot the difference!



While at Cobham Hall, perhaps because some were rotten, the balusters edging the balcony were thinned out. Our scheme would see new (matching) balusters reinstated alongside the remaining originals, overcoming the health and safety issue and restoring the original close-set look.

We now await Historic England's written pre-application advice. Once received, we shall revise our drawings accordingly and submit our application for Listed Building Consent in the spring. Watch this space for regular project updates and feel free to get in touch. You can contact me by email at rachel.kerr@medway.gov.uk

Notes

1. Pinning down the story of the chalet, from loose timber to iconic literary retreat, as well as understanding the impact each rebirth had on its physical integrity, is something the chalet stakeholder group is using archives to help explore.
2. The Dickens Fellowship (the local Rochester and Chatham branch, plus central HQ), The Friends of Eastgate House, The City of Rochester Society, City Guides, The Rochester Bridge Trust and, in future, (we hope!) Friends of Medway Archives.
3. This is a detailed, prescriptive description of every element of work needed. It will ensure the high-quality craftsmanship the chalet requires, and that a realistic comparison can be made between any invited tenders.
4. The existing handrail is about 800mm high, and the regulations require a minimum height of 1100mm. Similarly, the gaps between the baluster are too wide.

From Ruin To Revival: Historic Georgian Mansion, Chatham House, Gets A Makeover

George Atzev



George Atzev is an urban design and planning student. He is also the founder of Future Chatham, a source of information about the development and regeneration of Chatham and wider Medway. George takes a great interest in traditional architecture, with a particular passion for the Georgian, Victorian and Edwardian architectural styles, including more locally the work of architect George Edward Bond. He is driven to reveal, protect and celebrate the architectural heritage of Medway, having co-delivered a growing portfolio of heritage engagement programmes, including projects about St Bartholomew's Hospital and Chatham House.

Work to restore the front of a Grade II*-listed Georgian mansion in Rochester that was once home to the pioneering retail chain Featherstones' has reached completion. The building at 351 High Street on the corner of Hulkes Lane and the High Street, known as Chatham House, underwent a makeover after sitting in a dilapidated state of repair since it became vacant in the 1980s.



Left: Chatham House before work began and (right below) after the exterior restoration was completed in September 2022.

Chatham House was built in around 1730-1740 as a substantial and prestigious mansion house for the owner of the brewery behind it in Hulkes Lane. The brewery was leased by brewer Isaac Wildash and his son John, who later went into business with Thomas Hulkes, who took it over in 1795. Shortly after, Chatham House became home to James Hulkes,* the son of Thomas Hulkes, who himself was a brewer. In 1877, the brewery and its adjoining mansion house were sold to Charles Arkcoll and Co., who renamed it the Lion Brewery. Brewing later ceased on the site in 1912.



The sale of the site to Featherstones' in the early 1900s was a pivotal moment for Chatham House. Featherstones' was a family-run department store chain based in Medway, with branches in Chatham, Rochester, Strood and further afield. Chatham House became the firm's home furnishing department, and in 1936 the railings, portico and forecourt of the mansion were removed to make way for the installation of a new modern shopfront.

The home department offered 'everything for the home', with carefully curated showroom settings presented in the various rooms of the Georgian mansion to inspire customers. Down in the cellar-level warehouses behind Chatham House was the toy department, which was set up during the winter months starting from November for the lead-up to Christmas. Meanwhile, the top floor of the mansion hosted the pram department. Elsewhere in the Georgian house, there was also the hardware and electrical department, as well as a carpeting department, which was based on the lower floor.

Featherstones' ceased trading in the early 1980s, forcing the home department at Chatham House to close and leaving the mansion empty. It quickly fell into a poor state of repair both internally and externally, and a lack of funding made it difficult to undertake any improvements beyond urgent repairs. Consequently, the mansion was placed on the Heritage at Risk register due to its poor condition and uncertain future. An earlier grant scheme - the Rochester Town Heritage Initiative - provided some funding towards the restoration of the front of the property. While the 1936-built shopfront was demolished in 2003, the reinstatement of the portico, entrance steps and boundary railings was unable to progress further at the time. Although funding continued to remain limited, the re-roofing of the building was achieved in around 2006 to ensure it was weatherproof.



Chatham House and the 1936-built shopfront pictured in the early 2000s, before the shopfront was demolished in 2003. Photograph from Medway Council.

In 2020, the Chatham Intra area between Star Hill in Rochester and Sun Pier in Chatham was designated as a High Street Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ) by Historic England with Medway Council. Crucially, Chatham House was included as part of a re-use and re-vitalise buildings programme. Around £200,000 in government funding was granted to Featherstones' to reinstate a copy of the original porch and railings, as well as the construction of new entrance steps and external façade repairs.



Scaffolding and hoarding disguised Chatham House for much of 2022 while the external restoration was underway

The restoration project started at the beginning of 2022 and was completed just in time for the Heritage Open Days in September that year. The doors to Chatham House were swung open to more than 700 people across two weekends, who were able to explore all floors inside the mansion house – including the cellar! Chatham House now sports a vibrant, yellow-coloured appearance, one of the original colours of the painted façade revealed by architectural paint research during the restoration.



Left: the reinstated copy of the original railings and gate.



Below: the porch following the restoration project.



Left: the grand staircase inside Chatham House.

Below right: a room with a fireplace on the top floor of the mansion house.



Left: the chapel with restored stained-glass windows in a room to the rear of Chatham House.

Right: the cellar beneath the building.



Running alongside the restoration, I and Natasha Boardman-Steer from Creatabot (Natasha is also a member of the FOMA Committee) were commissioned by Medway Council to deliver a heritage engagement and reminiscence project about Featherstones' presence at Chatham House. Our project, entitled *Featherstones' Memories*, focussed on historical images from the Medway Archives Centre to inspire conversations about Featherstones' and trigger memories for people who may have worked or shopped at Chatham House. We received dozens of personal anecdotes from the local community, with memories ranging from the Christmas grottos to the Lamson Paragon pneumatic tubes that once whizzed cash around the mansion! One of the most significant contributions during the project was from Janet Skinner who provided a four-page memoir of her time working at Featherstones' as a prop maker and window dresser, including photos of the window displays she helped create. As part of the project, we were also very fortunate to produce an oral history film with Christopher Featherstone, the grandson of the retail chain's founder John Featherstone. In the hour-long interview, Christopher spoke fondly of his memories and experiences of working at Chatham House and in the wider family-run business. Our hour-long interview, which can be found at Medway Archives Centre, enabled the production of a shorter, 14-minute film that was shared via YouTube and social media, reaching over 6,800 people who were very pleased to see and hear from Christopher, who they remembered from Featherstones'.



Christopher Featherstone, grandson of John Featherstone, in our filmed oral history interview.

A new chapter now unfolds for Chatham House. A programme of interior refurbishment work is set to begin, which will see the rooms of the grand Georgian mansion sympathetically restored to their former glory in the hope to secure a community-based tenant in the near future. Our *Featherstones' Memories* project enhanced the collections at Medway Archives Centre and will hopefully inspire the next generation of community projects and researchers to dig even deeper into the striking commercial heritage of Chatham House and the retail empire of the Featherstone family.

*Editor's Note

The Medway Archives Centre (MAC) holds a large collection of manuscripts and documents relating to the Hulkes family. Many of these were presented by FOMA to MAC in April 2013, having been purchased at auction by the Friends. The donation marked the launch of the FOMA Collection at MAC and more can be found at <http://foma-lsc.org/collection.html>

All photographs by the author, except where specified.

The Anglo-American Bookshop

Chris de Coulon Berthoud



Chris de Coulon Berthoud is currently writing a PhD in Social Anthropology at the University of Kent. His work focusses on our shared human relationships with the past; previously writing about traumatic memory in descendants of Belgian Holocaust survivors, and the practice of Second World War re-enactment in the UK. His current work examines the role of the amateur in shaping and producing local history and heritage narratives in the Medway Towns. He is Secretary of FOMA and works part-time at the Medway Archives Centre.

Part One: A Risqué Business

This is the story of how a Chatham hairdresser with film-star good looks became embroiled in an obscenity case with unlikely links to the BBC radio and television comedy series, *Hancock's Half Hour*, and the execution of Lord Haw Haw.

Cecil Reede, a qualified Master Hairdresser, was a handsome man with immaculately coiffed film-star looks. He was often to be seen standing in the doorway of 316 Chatham High Street, in the short white coat he wore to protect his clothes when cutting hair, a comb tucked jauntily in his breast pocket, surveying the passing trade on the narrow pavement outside his shop. Some even said he resembled a young Ronald Coleman.¹

At some point the barber's shop had begun to sell books and magazines to customers, and number 316 Chatham High Street was renamed the 'Anglo-American Bookshop'. It became a favourite place for young comics enthusiasts as the Anglo-American stocked the perennially popular superhero comics from the USA which were still very hard to come by in wartime Britain. Brought over in the holds of ships as an inexpensive and easily disposable form of ballast, these comics soon became available in various dockyard towns and cities throughout Britain. Instead of being recycled as valuable paper waste, astute dealers were able to obtain these rare comics which were worth their weight in gold. The Anglo-American Bookshop also functioned as a Book Exchange, where customers could return a book after reading it for a small percentage credit on a subsequent purchase.

British publishing began to struggle under the restrictions caused by wartime paper rationing. At the same time that paper shortages were cutting publishers' paper stocks by up to 40% of pre-war levels, book sales climbed by 50%. As well as comics, the Anglo-American Bookshop also dealt in the detective and romance titles that were being brought out by a burgeoning British pulp publishing industry in order to sate the appetites of a readership wanting more visceral reading matter. The mass market paperback was still relatively new, having been introduced by Allen Lane at Penguin Books in 1935, and its introduction heralded a publishing boom in cheaply produced low-brow fiction. In time the Anglo-American Bookshop became known as somewhere prone to 'lean towards the risqué end of the paperback and magazine market'. In the more serious parts of the publishing world, talented authors like Julian Maclaren-Ross² had their careers hampered by small print runs and impossibility of reprints of their more successful books, meaning their much-vaunted talent never reached wider audiences until after their deaths. The ongoing effects of paper rationing were felt for some time after the war, which explains why JRR Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* was published in three separate volumes instead of one single tome.

At the same time that Cecil Reede was surveying Chatham's passers-by in April 1942, in London two authors and their publisher were standing in the dock at the Old Bailey facing an obscenity prosecution for just those racy novels for which the Anglo-American Bookshop became known. The authors were the improbably named Darcy Glinto (the pseudonym for the more prosaic Harold Kelly, who later wrote a number of the Hank Janson novels), and James Hadley Chase, also a pseudonym (for the more extravagantly named René Lodge Brabazon Raymond). Chase was a serving air force officer who went on to be one of the best-selling British thriller writers of all time: authors as eminent as H. E. Bates and John Betjeman appeared in the dock to defend his writing. Both authors and their publishers, were found guilty of obscenity charges in May 1942 and were fined significant sums of money. *The Times* of May 20, 1942, reported that Chase was fined £100, and Kelly was fined £100 plus 50 guineas costs (over £8,000 today); he was also imprisoned until the fine was paid.

It was clearly a widely reported case that caught the popular imagination. Another of Chase's novels *No Orchids for Miss Blandish* was satirised as *No Oysters for Miles Standish* in the Dogberry column of the *London Daily News* on 23 April, 1942, and although it wasn't one of the titles for which Kelly was prosecuted, George Orwell considered it bordering on the obscene. Further proof of its popularity is illustrated by the inclusion in a scene from Powell and Pressburger's 1944 classic *A Canterbury Tale*, in which one of the soldiers attending a lecture at the Colpepper Institute can be seen reading *No Orchid's* Indeed, it is said to have been the most widely read novel of the war, although it was apparently written as a bet 'to outdo James M Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice* in grossness and daring', with the first edition subtitled 'The toughest novel you ever read'.

A moral backlash was arguably unavoidable in this febrile atmosphere, in which the establishment was disquieted by seeing working-class service people hardened by war, loosening the shackles of propriety, in part by reading books judged meretricious and damaging to moral fibre. So it was that on 12 June, 1942, a headline appeared on page two of the *Chatham Standard*: 'BOOKSELLERS SUMMONED – Obscene Literature Allegations.' Cecil Reede and a co-defendant, James Hill, were summoned before the Chatham Bench 'to show why the alleged obscene books found on their premises should not be destroyed.' Superintendent H. R. Webb asked for an adjournment until June 29 so that the large number of books seized could be 'read and studied', suggesting further action might be taken.

The images below are courtesy of Richard Bourne. Richard took the top image himself in 1974 shortly before the demolition of the shops. Reede's is the shop next to Marcus' Stores.

With thanks to Betty Cole and Richard Bourne for their reminiscences.

Notes

1. The actor Ronald Colman (1891 –1958) began his career in Britain in theatre and silent films. He moved to Hollywood where he became one of the biggest stars of his time during what many call the Golden Age of cinema.
2. The British novelist Julian Maclaren-Ross (1912–1964) was also a journalist, short-story writer, memoirist, screenwriter, and literary critic.



Screengrab from the BBC's Hancock's Half Hour.

The Sharp family of Gillingham, c1897

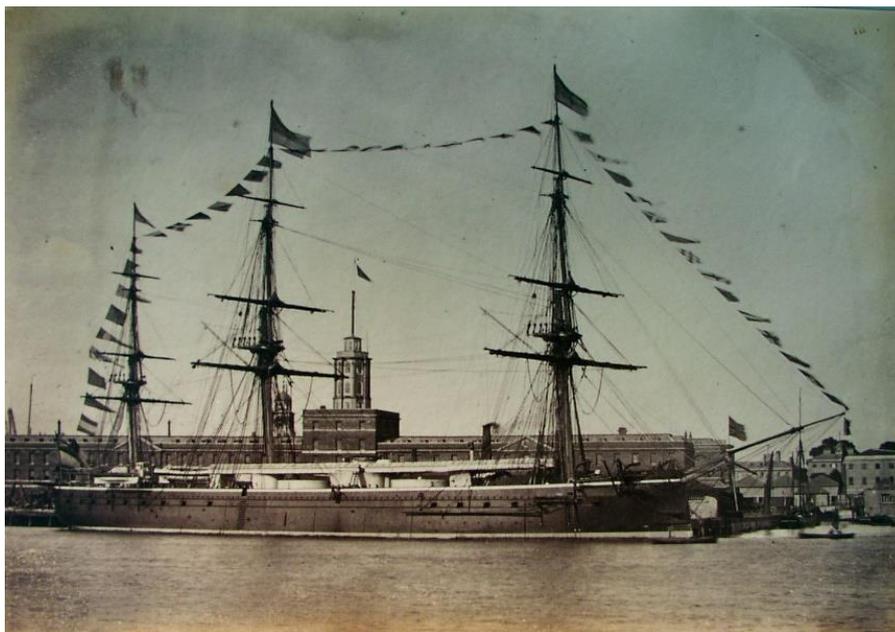
Peter Bursey



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

Part Two: An Unusual Commission: Joseph Sharp RM serves on HMS *Monarch* May 1869-November 1871

In the last issue I introduced my great grandfather Joseph Sharp (1844-1923), Royal Marine and barber of New Brompton. Between May 1869 and November 1871 he was serving on HMS *Monarch* as a Royal Marine, and these notes discuss an unusual commission this new ship was asked to undertake between December 1869 and March 1870.



The *Monarch* (pictured) was a notable vessel as the very first sea-going turret ship; i.e. it marked the end of Royal Navy ships having guns disposed along their sides as Nelson had known. She was launched in May 1868 and completed in June 1869 at which time she was the fastest warship afloat and able to achieve 14.94 knots with a steaming range of about 2,000 miles.

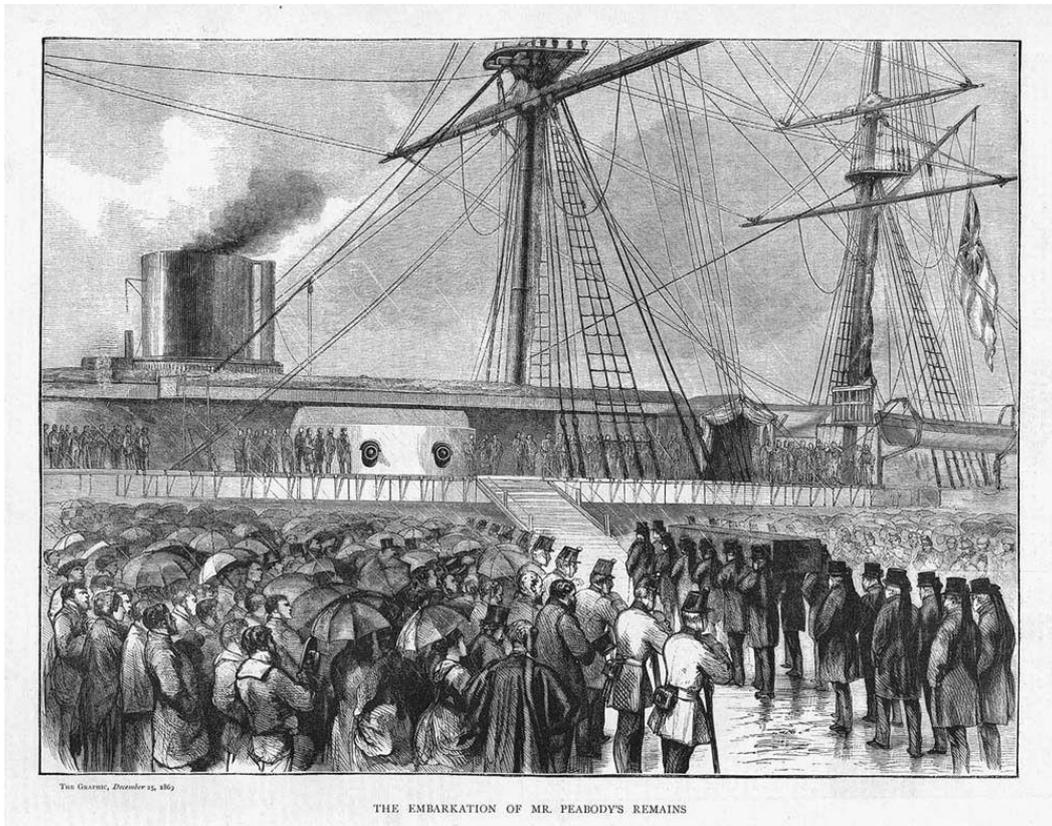
This early photograph of HMS *Monarch* when she was ship-rigged shows her two turrets under the awning. They were located fore and aft of the funnel and were turned by steam power with backup hand winches. For her first commission she was assigned to the Channel Squadron but, at the end of that year, as Britain's newest battleship and 'ironclad', she was given an unusual commission.



George Peabody, American philanthropist, mid 1860s.

In November 1869 the rich American banker and philanthropist George Peabody (pictured) died in London and, as a political gesture, Queen Victoria gave her consent for his remains to be returned to the United States, for burial in his home town of Danvers, Massachusetts, in a Royal Navy warship. That warship was the *Monarch*. Today, if his name is known at all, it is as the founder of the Peabody Estates found on plaques on some large blocks of flats in London and elsewhere. In Victorian England though, he was often in the news because of his good works in helping the poor. He had a modest background and, during the *War of 1812* became a successful merchant. In 1827 he found himself in England negotiating the sale of American cotton in Lancashire, then in 1838, he increased his wealth enormously by purchasing Maryland bonds. In 1851, when American products were unable to be displayed at the Great Exhibition at Crystal Palace that year (due to the US Congress being unwilling to fund their display), Peabody stepped in and paid. This enabled the British public to see many new American products such as Colt's revolver, McCormick's reaping machine and fine new daguerreotype photographs. Peabody shared the concerns of many, including Charles Dickens, about the suffering of the poor in society and began building subsidised housing for the working class in London. He

also established an Education Fund. His greatest social work was in America so, when he died on 4 November 1869 he was honoured on both sides of the Atlantic for his generous philanthropic activities.

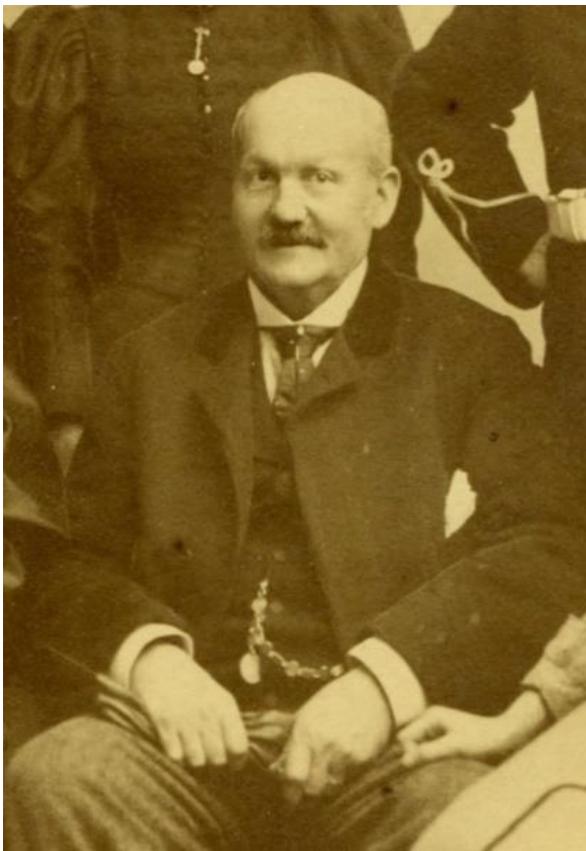


'The embarkation of Mr Peabody's remains' The Graphic, 25 December 1869.

On Saturday 11 December 1869 the *Monarch*, commanded by Captain Commerell, left Spithead carrying the coffin of Mr Peabody, accompanied by an American corvette, the *Plymouth*. A temporary but elegant chapel had been built in the stern of the vessel to accommodate his remains. During the voyage a royal marine guard stood outside the chapel. They arrived at Portland, Maine on January 25 when the chapel was opened to visitors for a few days until the Americans had prepared their City Hall ready to receive the coffin. It was formally delivered on the 29 January by Captain Commerell to the Governor of Maine, Mr Chamberlaine. The *Monarch's* band played a dirge while the marines accompanied the bier to the City Hall where it was to lay in state on a richly decorated catafalque. In his speech, the governor said, 'The United States appreciated the national courtesy of Great Britain and the tenderness with which Queen Victoria had restored the venerated remains of Mr Peabody to his native country. The *Monarch* had achieved a greater victory than her guns could ever win.' Many thousands of Americans came to view the spectacle. But what did this have to do with Joseph Sharp? Well, as a Royal Marine, he took part in Peabody's funeral cortege which was, quite literally, an international event.

The *Monarch* left Portland on February 14 for Annapolis where she arrived on 19 of the same month. Many dignitaries came to visit, including the US Secretary of State for War, many naval officers, and members of the Congress and the Senate. It is reported that President Grant was due to visit. As the newest, and probably the most advanced warship in the world, the *Monarch* was a star attraction in Washington. The marines must have been very busy policing the ship!

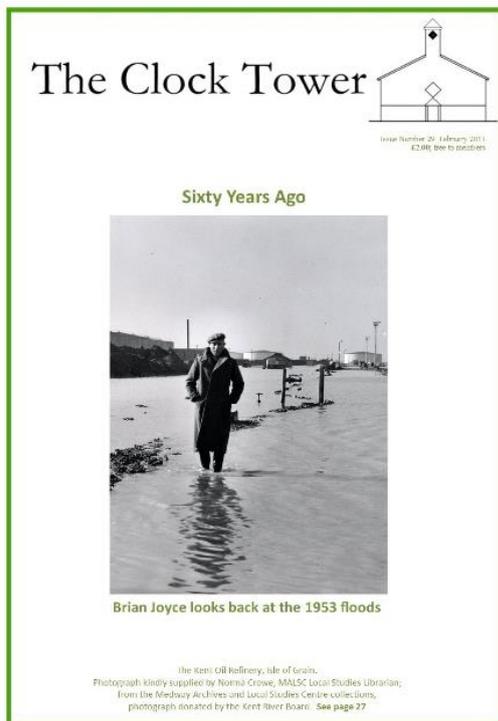
There was much official correspondence between the US and Britain from Captain Commerell to the Admiralty, and from the British Consul and British Ambassador to the Foreign Secretary, the Earl of Clarendon. In all these letters, reference is only ever to the kindnesses given to the ship's officers (including a ball at the US Naval Academy), the sailing performance of the *Monarch*, and the discharge of their duties. I have searched many newspapers in the British Newspaper Archive looking for references to the crew and how they were received but to no avail. The officers were given a tour of Washington so I daresay the crew were let loose at some point, however, unlike in 1812 when the navy burnt the White House in retaliation for American collusion with the French, this time they would have all been received warmly. At least, let's hope so! The *Monarch* arrived back in Portsmouth at the end of March 1870.



This is the only known photograph of Joseph Sharp, taken in 1897. By then he had retired from the Royal Marines and had settled down to the life of a barber working from his home in Church Path, New Brompton. The experiences Joseph gained in America so soon after the American Civil War had finished in 1865, and before Custer's Last Stand of 1876, would have remained with him all his life. Moreover, it is also important to add that he would not have seen the Statue of Liberty as construction only began in 1876 and it was not completed until 1886. After Joseph retired, he may well have discussed his experiences in conversation with his customers and family.

Photographs from the author's collection.

The East Coast Floods of 1953 – A Major New Novel by Author Cherry Burroughs



One of the most searched *Clock Tower* back issues on the FOMA website (<http://foma-lsc.org>) is the one we published ten years ago in February 2013 (pictured) which featured a series of articles on the East Coast floods of 1953. The special feature commemorated the sixtieth anniversary of the floods and included articles by Brian Joyce and Norma Crowe, plus additional memories from Barry Cox, Christine Furminger, Gillian Evans, Keith Lambourne, Elaine Gardner, and Odette Buchanan. Brian Joyce wrote:

‘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.’

It is hard to believe that ten years have passed since we published that popular feature. To coincide with the seventieth anniversary of the disaster, we are delighted to announce the publication of a major new novel, *The Farmer and the Fury* by author Cherry Burroughs (pictured).

The Farmer and the Fury follows the story of George and Annie Hadley, whose family farmed on an island in the Thames Estuary. When the flood arrives, the island is almost completely submerged. Annie and the children try to escape to the mainland, but George must stay behind and attempt to save his animals, their home and livelihood. When the waters recede will anything of their former life remain?

About her historical novel, Cherry says: ‘The great flood was a harrowing experience for my husband and his family who farmed on Foulness Island. He recalls his father telling him the family were saved from the flood waters when the barking of their Labrador, Sam, woke him up. What he saw next is detailed in the book within the character of George Hadley:

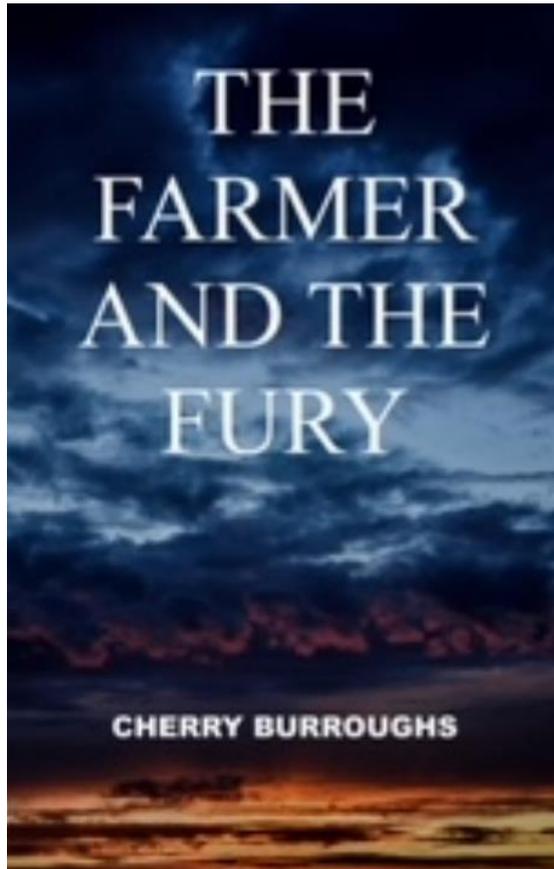
For a few seconds, George saw snow. But the ground shimmered like liquid glass. Then he realised it was water. Silent, unstoppable water, the ground invisible beneath its swirling mass. He thought of his children and a cold fear entered his chest ...



My husband's earliest childhood memory is when they were rowed across submerged fields, in sub-zero temperatures and gale force winds, to board a fishing smack which took them to the mainland. He can also remember his father's despair when their livestock either drowned or were slaughtered by government welfare inspectors. Tons of sea salt destroyed the quality of the soil and when the flood waters receded, their fields were covered by the white threads of thousands of drowned earth worms.

Wherever we live, global warming and climate change concerns everyone and affects our daily lives. The great North Sea flood of 1953 is embodied in our local history, not just because of the tragic loss of life but also because it reminds all of us of our own vulnerabilities when faced with the power of nature, a theme which is still relevant today.

The Farmer and the Fury is about the determination to survive and enduring love. It is dedicated to all those affected by the great North Sea flood.'



Cherry (www.cherryburroughs.co.uk) is a family law barrister and is a member of Brentwood Writers' Circle. She has lived in Essex all her life and is married to a farmer. *The Farmer and the Fury* is available on Amazon and in all good bookshops now! ISBN: 9798366059251

Readers' Letters

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

The Fountain Elwin Family

In September 2022, Angela Carles contacted *Clock Tower* Editor, Amanda Thomas asking for information on the Fountain Elwin family, descendants of Pocahontas. Angela is still hoping to find out more – which is why we are publishing her original email below. However, in the meantime, Amanda has corresponded further with Angela and put her in touch with other descendants, including Stuart Cresswell who wrote *A Descendant of Pocahontas* in Issue 6 of *The Clock Tower*, May 2007. This number marked the four hundredth anniversary of the founding of Jamestown, Virginia, and contained a special series of features on Pocahontas. Then, in Issue 7, August 2007, we covered the launch of the exhibition *Pocahontas, An American Princess: The Birth of a Colony* which ran until September 2007 at Rochester's Guildhall Museum. The central exhibit was the 1617 burial record for Rebecca Wroth or Rolf, alias Pocahontas, contained in the first parish register of St George's church, Gravesend, and held at the Medway Archives Centre.



Vice President of The Friends of Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre, Professor Sir Robert Worcester KBE DL (left), and (then) MALSC Borough Archivist, Stephen Dixon, at An evening with Sir Robert Worcester: commemorating the 400th anniversary of the voyage to Jamestown, USA on 24 May 2007 at the Guildhall Museum, Rochester, Kent.

28 September 2022.

Hello,

I hope you don't mind my contacting you about some family tree research I'm doing, and have been doing for some time. I came across your details while reading the article *A Descendant of Pocahontas* [see above] ... mentioning, amongst others, the Elwin family.

I'm interested in finding out more about Fountain Elwin of Enfield 1737-1833 (the Elwins listed stop at the generation just before with his father Peter Elwin 1701-1782) along with his wife, possibly a certain Ann Maria Mathews, a widower, with some people online giving her maiden name as Gibson but without sources.

I found what appears to be a 1793 marriage certificate for them, unless he is another Fountain Elwin. However, several of their children seem to have been born before that date which makes me wonder whether this is correct. Also, going by the above memorial description, Ann Maria would have been about 36 when they married, making her perhaps a little too old to go on and have six children.

My interest is that I believe the two witnesses to this marriage ... John Hartley and Jane Hartley (née Mathews) who themselves married in 1792, to be my 4*GGP. And, that there could be a link between Ann Maria and Jane Mathews. What is intriguing is that amongst John Hartley and Jane Mathews's six children the following Christian names were given:

- Thomas **Elwin** Hartley b1796
- **Fountain Elwin** Hartley b1798 my 3*GG
- John **Gibson** Hartley b1802
- Thomas **Elwin** Hartley b1804
-

I feel there has to be a connection especially as the name Fountain, an unusual Christian name, is repeated in descendants and is obviously of some importance to them.

I was wondering whether you may just be able to throw any light on the matter. Or, maybe you would know of someone else who could possibly be able to help?

I very much look forward to hearing back from you. Thank you very much for your time,

Best regards,

Angela Carles.

Kennel Farm

In the last issue of *The Clock Tower* (Issue 68, November 2022), FOMA's Brian Butler investigated the history of Kennel Farm. FOMA member, Janet King contacted us with further information; the information was passed on to Brian. These information images are too large to print here, but can be viewed in the online version of *The Clock Tower* at www.foma-lsc.org/journal.html

1 December 2022

Dear Amanda,

I found the attached among my resources and wondered if it might be of use to Brian Butler. They are from some information that I got from Holcombe. We lodged several early maps of the general area with the [Medway] Archive Centre a few years ago, which may also be of interest.

Kind regards,

Janet.

The land that is now 'Holcombe' can be found in the Domesday Book as part of the Manor of Horsted, the Manor House being where Fort Horsted now stands. Although it was an area well known to Neolithic man, as a bronze age pathway or 'Old Way' ran by its grounds. We know it was known to the Romans as various artifacts including a lead coffin which is now in the British Museum have been found within its boundaries. It was also part of the site of a most bloody battle, between the Saxons and the British in the year 455. Between 1580 and 1590 the estate became Kennel Farm, the 'Old Way' had become a bridle track called Roman Road, the newly built Manor House was then called 'Kennel Cottage' and not 'Holcombe' as we know it today

By the early Nineteenth Century 'Kennel Farm' had become commonly known as 'Slatheries Farm' after its owner, a Mr J. Slatherie, who was a friend of John Dickens, the father of the great author. The young Charles visited Kennel Cottage and farm on a number of occasions and many of his walks took him past the farm and cottage, walks which he was later to describe as 'The loveliest of walks in all England'. This was the route that Mr Pickwick and Co, were to take when they visited 'Manor Farm, Dingley Dell', which is believed to have been Kennel Farm, and which at that time still had a rookery and a pond. The Dell is known as 'The Conney Banks' and the 'Blue Lion' was the then 'Hook and Hatchet' now known as the 'Poachers Pocket'.

The Winch family being somewhat large in number, had outgrown their residence in Gibraltar Terrace, and George Winch could now afford a Manor House something like Chatham House, built by Inigo Jones, for a former owner of the Chatham Brewery. The mansion was considerably damaged in the Second Great fire of Chatham in 1820.

He purchased Kennel Cottage and 48 acres of land that surrounded it. He did not though buy the rest of the farm, which spread across to the Delce in Rochester, which was sold for housing. The only part that still remains of the farm is a field on Pattens Lane, which was used for many years by the school's Old Boys' Hockey and Cricket Clubs, and some former farm cottages which can be found in Rochester's Blaker Avenue. George Winch rebuilt Kennel Cottage adding a new wing, in the style of his wife's family's ancestral home 'Holcombe Court' a fine towered Elizabethan house in Devon, which he renamed 'Holcombe'.

It was a perfectly appointed mansion of Tudor elevation, substantially built of red brick with overhanging eaves and half timber work to the upper floors. It contained entrance and lounge halls, four reception rooms, fourteen bed and dressing rooms, two bathrooms and ample domestic offices. The house was situated in charming gardens and grounds, studded with timber and other trees of mature growth and miniature park and woodlands, occupying 28 acres. There was stabling for five horses, a farmery, a garage, coachman's cottage and a large carriage entrance. Some of the unique

Images from Janet King.

News and Events

Calendar of Forthcoming Events and Exhibitions

FOMA Talks and Events

All events are subject to change and to government guidance. Further information will be available on the FOMA website (www.foma-lsc.org), our Facebook page (www.facebook.com/fomalsc) and sent to members via email, where appropriate.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Friday, 14 April 2023, 7.00 for 7.30 pm.

The location of the AGM and further details will be circulated to members by email, including the AGM leaflet, which will also be available online on the FOMA website, www.foma-lsc.org. If you require a paper copy, please contact the FOMA Chairman: Elaine Gardner, 102 Valley View Road, Rochester, ME1 3NX, Kent; emgardner@virginmedia.com; 01634 408595.

Medway Archives Centre

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

Events and Exhibitions

Exhibition: *Coming out of Covid*

Call in and discover more about Medway Pride Radio and its history

Thursday 2 February to Friday 31 March, 9am-5pm, Saturday 9am-12.30pm (closed Wednesday and Sunday)

Drop-in session: *The Town Hall, Chatham: the making of a model*

Saturday 4 March 2023 10am-midday

Join model-maker Peter Allen and see how he has created an accurate scale-model of the former Town Hall in Chatham, together with some of his models of buses. See the photos and architectural drawings he used and learn about his future projects.

Opening Hours and Visiting

Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm, Saturday 9am to 12.30pm, Wednesday and Sunday closed.

An appointment must be made to view original archive material and use microfilm or fiche readers

How to Make an Appointment

Email us at malsc@medway.gov.uk to make an appointment and to discuss which items you wish to consult. For original archive material you must give at least 3 working days' notice of your intention to visit. For all other material (such as books, maps, photographs) we just require 1 working day's notice. When you book we will ask for your name and contact details so that we can keep in touch with you about your appointment.

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

MEDWAY ARCHIVES CENTRE LECTURE SERIES 2023

Tickets are £4 each, or £20 for the whole series of 6 talks. Tickets can be purchased from Medway Archives Centre only – please ring 01634 332714 to pay over the phone, drop in, or email us at archives@medway.gov.uk for further details.

Tuesday 28 February, 2.00 pm
Islands of the Medway Estuary
Adam Taylor

This talk was in collaboration with the Friends of Medway Archives Centre (FOMA) and has already taken place at the time of publication.

Tuesday 28 March, 2.00 pm
Drunkness, Madness and Bigamy – the staff of Strood Workhouse
Deborah Collins

The conditions for the inmates of workhouses were dependent upon the quality of the workhouse staff and the Strood workhouse had a number of problems with the staff employed. This talk will explore some of their stories.

Tuesday 11 April, 2.00 pm
An Eighteenth-Century entrepreneur: Sarah Baker and her Kentish Theatres, 1737-1816
Dr Jean Baker

Sarah Baker was an illiterate fairground performer who became one of the most successful self-made women of the eighteenth century. She opened her Rochester Theatre in 1791. Sarah's pragmatic, opportunistic reaction to the many challenges she faced not only ensured her own survival but also meant that, albeit inadvertently, she played a hugely influential role in the political, social and cultural development of the rapidly evolving Kentish towns where she built her theatres at the end of the eighteenth century.

Jean Baker (not a descendant of Sarah Baker) worked as a journalist for some years. In 2000 she completed a PhD at the University of Kent that explored the significance of provincial theatre in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Her published work includes: 'The Proclamation Society, William Mainwaring and the Theatrical Representations Act of 1788', *Historical Research*, 76:193 (August 2003), 347-363; 'Theatre, Law and Society in the Provinces: The Case of Sarah Baker', *Cultural and Social History*, 1:2 (2004), 159-178. *Sarah Baker and her Kentish Theatres, 1737-1816: Challenging the Status Quo* (Society for Theatre Research, London, 2019).

Tuesday 23 May, 2.00 pm
Rochester Cathedral Heritage
Jacob Scott

The Chapter, staff and volunteers are committed to ensuring the Cathedral and collections serve to their full potential as resources in understanding the past and in facing the evolving challenges and opportunities presented by our world today. Jacob Scott is the Heritage Officer at the Cathedral, working for much of the last ten years in recording, researching and making this huge corpus available freely online. This work is increasingly focused on aspects and persons in the past that have previously been underrepresented in the written and archaeological records, or have perhaps been squeezed out of public interpretation programs by more dominant narratives, towards opening these areas for further research.

Tuesday 20 June, 2.00 pm

The Story of Isaac Newell: From Strood to Argentina and the Seeds of Modern Football

Amanda Thomas

Few people realise that one of Argentina's most legendary historical figures comes from Strood. Isaac Newell was born in 1853 in Taylors Lane, the third child of Joseph Newell of Essex and Mary Ann Goodger, who was from Higham. This talk will look at the family history of Isaac Newell and will explain how, following his emigration to Argentina in 1869, he and his son Claudio started a football club which would shape the future of the international game. It is a story destined to put Strood well and truly on the map, indeed the town has already become a place of pilgrimage for South American football fans.

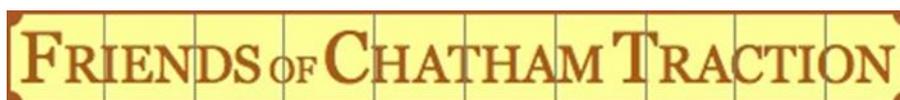
Tuesday 4 July, 2.00 pm

The Fake Peace within the Textus Roffensis

Dr Alexander Thomas

A treasure of Rochester Cathedral and formerly of the Medway Archives, the *Textus Roffensis* was created by Bishop Ernulf of Rochester and is an example of a 12th century AD *codex diplomaticus*. Often known as an exclusive encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon and early Kentish law code texts, it is one of just two manuscripts to only contain the Peace of Edward and Guthrum (Egu). For centuries this was thought to be a genuine Viking Age treaty text, but Egu is in fact an infamous forgery created by Archbishop Wulfstan of York. This lecture will explore the *Textus* itself as well as the impact of the fake text on contemporary research.

Dr Alexander Thomas is an independent historical and archaeological early career researcher of the Early Medieval period. Alexander also serves as Webmaster for the Friends of Medway Archives. Educated at Bristol University, his PhD in Archaeology and Anthropology examined the archaeological and manuscript landscapes of the late 9th century AD Danelaw Boundary. Alexander's current research interests focus on the governance of Viking Age England from around the late 8th century AD up to around AD1200. He is currently writing his first book for Amsterdam University Press which will reappraise the historical and archaeological evidence for the Danelaw. The book is due to be published in early-2025



This year's Annual General Meeting, on Saturday 4th March 2023, will be at the Huguenot Museum in Rochester. If anyone wishes to raise any specific issues at the meeting please let us know.

The formal Notice, plus Agenda, is here:

http://www.chathamtraction.org.uk/docs/2023_AGM_Notice_Agenda.pdf

The Minutes of the 2022 AGM can be found at:

http://www.chathamtraction.org.uk/docs/AGM_Minutes_22.pdf

The Summary Accounts for the period January - December 2022 are here:

http://www.chathamtraction.org.uk/docs/FoCT_Summary_accounts_2022.pdf

Associated legal and financial information is at:

http://www.chathamtraction.org.uk/docs/FoCT_Legal_+Financial_Info_2022.pdf

The Chairman's Report for 2022 is here:

http://www.chathamtraction.org.uk/docs/Chair_Report_for_2022.pdf

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



Friends of Broomhill

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

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

Secretary on 07968-380588 or email: secretary@friendsofbroomhill.org.uk

The Wreck SS Richard Montgomery

FOMA received many messages regarding the highly successful screening on Friday 11 November 2022, of *The Wreck SS Richard Montgomery*, a series of three films by Colin Harvey entitled, *The Doomsday Ship*, *Liberty Ships* and *A Disaster Waiting to Happen*. Colin will be back at FOMA again soon, hopefully for a viewing of his new film, *Wings over Rochester*, the story of Short Brothers in Rochester.

For those who missed the November event, we are indebted to Vanda Woollett for advising us of the following:

Medway Geographical & Local History Society
The Wreck SS Richard Montgomery
Colin Harvey
Friday 22nd September 2023, 2.00/3.30 pm
Holy Trinity Church Hall, Twydall Lane, Gillingham, Kent.

About The Clock Tower

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

Editorial deadlines

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

The copy deadline for Issue 70 of *The Clock Tower* is Monday 24 April 2023, with publication on Wednesday 17 May 2023.

Publication date

The fourth Wednesday following the editorial deadline.

The Clock Tower is printed by Barkers Litho, Unit 18 Castle View Business Centre, Gas House Road, Rochester, Kent, ME1 1PB; telephone: 01634 829048, email: info@barkerslitho.co.uk

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Front Cover Accreditations and Website Information

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

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

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

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

Further Information

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

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

Membership enquiries should be directed to the Membership Secretary, Jean Skilling, 15 Port Close, Lordswood, Chatham, ME5 8DU, Kent; membership@foma-lsc.org

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The 2022 Make A Difference Awards



The Medway Archive Centre (MAC) was recently awarded a Highly Commended certificate in Medway Council's prestigious award scheme. See page 4 for further details.

The Restoration of Dickens' Chalet ... the Next Chapter

On page 15 Medway Council's Rachel Kerr gives an update on the restoration of Dickens' Swiss Chalet, situated in the gardens of Rochester's Eastgate House.



Cindy's Retirement



Former Medway Archives Centre archivists (from left to right) Elspeth Millar, Alison Cable, and Stephen Dixon were all at Cindy's special party. MAC's Nikki Pratt managed to gather them together in (what can only be described as) an historic photograph to mark the occasion. For more on the party, see page 8.

A New Look For The Medway Archives Centre



If you are a regular visitor to MAC, you may have noticed that the wonderful exterior images have recently been changed. These new illustrations and photographs give a fabulous taste of what the Archive has to offer, and will hopefully entice those who have never visited into coming in. Photograph by Elaine Gardner.