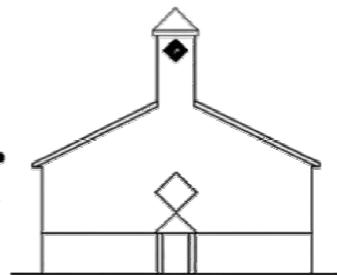


# The Clock Tower



Issue Number 33: February 2014  
£2.00; free to members

## Amateur Dramatics in Medway



*MALSC sets the scene for the first part of this special feature in their Christmas 2013 presentation of Bowled Over, devised by Julie Garton.*

*Pictured (left to right): Norma Crowe (Lord Darnley), Christoph Bull (Ivo Bligh) and Jean Lear (Florence Murphy). Picture, Amanda Thomas. See page 38.*

***Also inside: From Kent to Montana - The Medway Roots of Gary Cooper by Brian Joyce***

## The Rochester Bridge Trust's Exhibition



*Images from the private viewing of the Rochester Bridge Trust's exhibition Reconstructing Rochester Bridge, displayed at the Royal Engineers Museum.*



## *Christmas at MALSC*

Norma Crowe, Local Studies Librarian, Alison Cable, Borough Archivist and Cindy O'Halloran, Senior Archive and Local Studies Assistant. See page 26



*Photograph, Amanda Thomas.*

## *From the Chairman*

Tessa Towner, Chairman.



A belated Happy New Year to you all!

On 20 January 2014 I was delighted to attend a private viewing of the Rochester Bridge Trust's exhibition *Reconstructing Rochester Bridge*, displayed at the Royal Engineers Museum. This exhibition celebrates the centenary year of the rebuilding of the Rochester Old Bridge, which was completed in 1914. We were entertained with a short review of the building of this bridge accompanied by drinks and canapés (these just kept coming - tray after tray carried by smiling waitresses!) It really was a very enjoyable evening, and a couple of the photographs are featured here.

With the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the start of World War One approaching, FOMA aims to commemorate this with a series of exhibitions at MALSC each year until 1918. The first will start on 17 September 2014 and will continue until 1 November 2014. This exhibition will be about the men of the Medway Towns who died in 1914. If you have any family stories or pictures of the Medway men who died we would be pleased to hear from you (my details are on page 46). There was a massive mortality rate in the first three months of the war with the loss of six Royal Navy ships, and many of those who died or were wounded were local men or based in Chatham. Much of the historical focus to date on the First World War has been on the trenches and the stories of the men who fought in the conflict on land, however, those who were at sea must not be forgotten and that will be part of our contribution to the commemorations this year.

On Tuesday, 8 April, 2014, we will be holding our eighth Annual General Meeting at Frindsbury Parish Hall. Details are included in a special flyer with this issue - **please bring it with you** - and we look forward to seeing you then!

## The Live Bait Squadron

On the morning of 22 September 1914 some 130 men from the Medway Towns drowned when *HMS Cressy*, *Hogue* and *Aboukir* were torpedoed and sank off the Dutch coast. The men were known as The Live Bait Squadron and The Friends of Medway Archives (FOMA) is looking for their descendants. How did the families cope? What happened to them? Was there help available and what was the effect on the tight-knit communities of the Medway Towns? Was a member of your family on one of these ships? If so we would like to hear your stories!

The project is the result of research done by Dutchman, Henk van der Linden, following his discovery of the graves of some of these men in a cemetery in The Hague. In Issue 28 of *The Clock Tower* (November 2012), FOMA Chairman, Tessa Towner wrote of her involvement with Henk van der Linden and the quest to trace the descendants of the men on board the ships and the impact on their families. In September 2012 he published a book, *The Live Bait Squadron*, and a service was held at Rochester Cathedral for those who died. Many relatives attended and later met at the St. George's Centre, Chatham, where they were able to share their stories. Plans are now in hand for a similar event this year to commemorate the 100 years anniversary. More information is available on the website: [www.livebaitsqn-soc.info](http://www.livebaitsqn-soc.info) Send your stories to: Tessa Towner, [picketwitch@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:picketwitch@blueyonder.co.uk)

## *News and Events*

Odette Buchanan, Friends' Secretary



Hullo and Happy New Year to you all! I do hope none of you have been affected by the awful floods and high winds recently. I understand B&Q ran out of fence panels so many had been blown down! 2014 looks as if it is going to be very busy for FOMA with all the various things being planned to commemorate the outbreak of the First World War. Please check *News and Events* opposite. and be sure to put in your diary the talk on Tuesday, 10<sup>th</sup> June, 7.00 for 7.30 pm at Frindsbury Parish Hall. The well-known speaker Richard van Emden will be joining us give his talk *The Quick and The Dead*.

I continue to receive interesting questions from around the world. A lady who lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico, has been in correspondence and has kindly sent some photocopies of information about Anne Pratt, the nineteenth century botanist who lived in Strood. In the last issue you may recall another gentleman was interested in the Rochester Waterworks which used to supply the city from a spring near the Vines as an ancestor of his was involved with the company. You can read all our fascinating correspondence - and your replies - on pages 16 to 24.

Talking of the Vines, the Kent Gardens Trust (KGT) is producing information on all the green spaces in Medway. This will not only include a comprehensive list of all the flora and fauna but also a brief history. I was involved with supplying this information when Terri Zbyszewska and I met the two volunteers for their survey of the Vines recently. Other KGT volunteers will be surveying the other green spaces in due course. Another good resource for local research!

Whilst 2014 will be dominated by World War One, we should not forget some other anniversaries: These include the seventieth anniversary of the D Day landings and the twenty-fifth of the Berlin Wall coming down. Then 150 years ago in 1864 John Wisden published his first cricket almanac, the International Working Men's Association was founded in London, and the Bristol suspension bridge was opened across the Avon, a memorial to its designer, Isambard Kingdom Brunel. In January 1814 the last frost fair was held on the Thames. In June of the same year the first cricket match took place at Lords, George Stephenson's Rocket had its first outing (not on the cricket pitch, of course) and Jeremiah Colman started production of mustard near Norwich. Finally, the first public art gallery was opened at Dulwich, and last, but by no means least, there was a major disaster on 17 October 1814 – the London Beer Flood. A large vat of porter burst at Meux's brewery demolishing many buildings and killing nine people! On that sad note I'll let you get on and read the rest of *The Clock Tower*.

## *New Members*

A warm welcome to new FOMA members: Mr Neil Jordan; Mrs Angela Wallace; Miss Janet Beyer; Mr and Mrs Daniel Roberts; Mr Graham Giles.

## Daphne Argent

It was with great sadness that we heard of the death on 24 January 2014 of FOMA member Daphne Argent. Our sincere condolences to Daphne's family and friends.

## *News and Events*

### Calendar of Forthcoming Events and Exhibitions

#### FOMA Events

11<sup>th</sup> March 2014, 7.30 pm.  
Cinemas in the Medway Towns.  
A talk by Brian Joyce.

Tuesday, 8<sup>th</sup> April 2014, 7.00 for 7.30 pm.  
**FOMA AGM.** Business will be followed by light refreshments.  
Details are included in a special flyer with this issue - **please bring it with you.**

Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> April, 7.30 pm start.  
Quiz Night.  
£5 for members and non-members. **BOOKING REQUIRED** (see below).

10<sup>th</sup> June 2014, 7.30 pm.  
**A FOMA SPECIAL TALK TO COMMEMORATE THE OUTBREAK OF WORLD WAR ONE**  
The Quick and The Dead.  
A talk by celebrity speaker Richard van Emden.

**Booking for FOMA talks is no longer necessary! Until further notice all events 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

3<sup>rd</sup> February- 15<sup>th</sup> April 2014.  
Chatham Dockyard in The News.  
Marking the 30th anniversary of the closure of the Dockyard.

16<sup>th</sup> April - 17<sup>th</sup> June.  
Verses and extracts, 1934 -  
Celebrating 80 years of design education in Rochester.  
Linocuts by Students of the Medway School of Arts and Crafts.

19<sup>th</sup> June - 19<sup>th</sup> August.  
Pills, Potions & Promises.  
Looking at early advertising in Medway.

21<sup>st</sup> August - 1<sup>st</sup> November.  
World War One Exhibition.  
Lest We Forget, Part One, 1914.  
Organised by The Friends of Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre.

17<sup>th</sup> November 2014 - 13<sup>th</sup> January 2015.  
'A little of what you fancy...'  
A century of entertainment in Medway.

15<sup>th</sup> January 2015 - 4<sup>th</sup> March 2015.

Plaque to Plaque.

Edwin Harris' contribution to the plaques in and around Rochester High Street.

## Talks and Events

26<sup>th</sup> February 2014, 2.30 pm.

The Self Tapping Screw.

A talk by the author Simon Barlow.

March/April; date to be confirmed.

Chatham Dockyard.

A talk by Richard Holdsworth of the Chatham Dockyard Historical Trust. **BOOKING REQUIRED.**

Chatham Library, Community Hub Chatham, Gun Wharf, Dock Road, Chatham, Kent ME4 4TX.

Booking and information: Community Hub Chatham 01634 337799; [chatham.library@medway.gov.uk](mailto:chatham.library@medway.gov.uk)

17<sup>th</sup> September, 2.30 pm.

Remembering the Men of the Medway Towns in WW1.

The Michael de Caville Index.

A talk by Tessa Towner.

17<sup>th</sup> December, 2.30 pm.

'Your Own, Your Very Own...'

Theatres and music halls in Victorian Medway.

A talk by Brian Joyce.

**Unless otherwise indicated, all the above are held at the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre, (MALSC) Civic Centre, Strood, Rochester, Kent ME2 4AU, and all talks and events are now free of charge. 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 MALSC and until further notice, we are still to be found in the Clock Tower building, Civic Centre, Strood, Rochester, Kent ME2 4AU.**

**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. For Satnav please use ME2 2AD.**

**PLEASE NOTE THAT THE ANNUAL STOCK TAKING CLOSURE WILL TAKE PLACE FROM 3 NOVEMBER TO 15 NOVEMBER 2014 INCLUSIVE.**

## 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. Eastgate House is now closed. Further information can be obtained at: <http://www.friendsof-eastgatehouse.org> on Facebook on <http://www.facebook.com/eastgatehouse> and on Twitter <https://twitter.com/EastgateHouse>. To join the Friends of Eastgate House, please contact Terri Zbyszewska, The Membership Secretary, FoEH, 31 The Esplanade, Rochester, ME1 1QW or at [tzbyszewska@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:tzbyszewska@yahoo.co.uk); a copy of the membership form is also available on the website.

## 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](http://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](mailto:cafurminger@blueyonder.co.uk) for further information and how to join. Members meetings take place on the second Wednesday of the month in the Auditorium at the Visitor Information Centre, Rochester. For further information please contact Christine Furminger, as above.

See Rochester's wealth of historic buildings and hear about the City's long and fascinating history from an enthusiastic and knowledgeable guide of the City of Rochester Society.! Every Saturday, Sunday, Wednesday and Public Holiday from Good Friday until the end of October. Starting at 2.15 p.m. from The Visitors Centre, High Street, Rochester. The tours are free of charge, but donations to Society funds are always gratefully received.

## Friends of Broomhill



Broomhill Park has been awarded a third Green Flag; the Award recognises the best green spaces in the country. Help us get a Green Flag for the fourth year running and improve our quite high score in the RHS South East in Bloom competition.

Sunday, 2 February, 11 am - 1.00 pm - Bob Wade commemoration big scrub clear Task Day. Come and help to continue to fulfil Bob's dying wish of us all putting something good back into the environment. Meet at King Arthur's Drive entrance; tools provided or bring your own.

Sunday, 2 March, 11.00 am to 1.00 pm - Wild flower planting Task Day. Meet at King Arthur's Drive entrance; tools provided or bring your own. It's fun, it's free and it's healthy.

Thursday, 15th May, 7.30 for 8.00pm, **Friends of Broomhill AGM**, Strood Library.

After the business of our first AGM as a registered charity - the first green space in Medway to become such - Odette Buchanan will give a short, illustrated, interactive talk, Memories of the Prefabs. If you have any memories to include, please send them to Odette Buchanan, 72 Jersey Rd, Strood, ME2 3PE; [odette\\_buchanan@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:odette_buchanan@yahoo.co.uk); 01634 718231.

Sunday, 22nd June, Funday.

### Healthy Walks

Every Tuesday, meet at Strood Library at 9.45 am. A guided and pleasant walk with wonderful views overlooking the Medway and Thames, and woodland paths. Duration about 60 minutes. Complimentary tea and coffee served in the library after the walk. Sorry - dogs not allowed in the library. Contact: 01634 333720

## The Royal Engineers Museum, Library and Archive

Prince Arthur Road, Gillingham, Kent, ME4 4UG; [www.re-museum.co.uk](http://www.re-museum.co.uk)



The Royal Engineers Museum is Kent's largest military museum, with a 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.

The Royal Engineers Museum now has an e-newsletter. To subscribe for free, email 'Yes Please!' to [deputycurator@re-museum.co.uk](mailto:deputycurator@re-museum.co.uk)

Events (Please see the website ([www.re-museum.co.uk](http://www.re-museum.co.uk)) for more details.).

January 2014 - November 2018 - First World War Battlefield Tour Groups.  
For more information or to book this offer please call: 01634 822312.

27 February 2014, 7.00 pm - Lecture: Afghanistan in 1878-80. Photographs taken by the Bengal Sappers & Miners in the RE Collection.  
Tickets: £5 (includes refreshments). Booking is essential as places are limited, please book early to avoid disappointment. To reserve a place call: 01634822312.

27 March 2014, 7.00 pm - Lecture: From Tree Trunks to Triangles the Story of First World War Bridging.  
Tickets: £5 (includes refreshments). Booking is essential as places are limited, please book early to avoid disappointment. To reserve a place call: 01634822312.

29 - 30 March 2014, 11.30am to 5.00pm - Kent's Big Weekend.  
Gain FREE entry to the Museum with an allocated My Kent Big Weekend voucher.

8th - 11th April 2014, 10.30am – 3.30pm - Zulu Family Activities.

15th - 17th April 2014, 10.30am – 3.30pm - World War Two Family Activities.

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.

## Chatham World Heritage News

Following consideration of the Chatham World Heritage Partnership's recent Technical Evaluation, the government decided not to propose Chatham Dockyard and its Defences as a World Heritage Site. The next UK nomination will be the Lake District, in 2016.

Cllr Rodney Chambers, Leader of Medway Council, said: "Everybody behind the bid – which includes the council, the Historic Dockyard, Fort Amherst, the Royal Engineers and the Chatham World Heritage Partnership – has worked extremely hard and achieved so much. I would like to thank them for their hard work, dedication and support. It is important to note how much the area has changed since the closure of the dockyard 30 years ago in terms of regeneration. The World Heritage bid has played a significant part in that, and that will not end with this decision. The bid has brought many benefits, not least promoting an awareness of Chatham's heritage both nationally and internationally but also helping to encourage investment in Medway's future. That work will continue."

Whilst this is very disappointing news, the Partnership has achieved a great deal under the umbrella of the World Heritage Site bid, and the Partnership is pleased to confirm that plans are under way to submit a Heritage Lottery Fund bid for further investment in Fort Amherst and the Great Lines Heritage Park in 2014.

At the beginning of December 2013, The Historic Dockyard announced it had received £4.53m from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) to support the Command of the Oceans project.

'Command of the Oceans will secure the repair and preservation of a range of Scheduled Ancient Monuments and 18th century ships' timbers. It will create world class galleries and visitor facilities to reveal the story and significance of the dockyard and its defences during the age of sail, and will deliver a fitting sense of arrival for visitors - not only to The Historic Dockyard, but also to the potential World Heritage Site - through the creation of 4.5 hectares of public realm and a free-to-enter Discovery Centre.

Chief Executive of Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust, Bill Ferris OBE, notes: "Command of the Oceans is arguably the most significant single project undertaken by the Trust in pursuit of its educational charitable purposes since the "Wooden Walls" gallery opened in the late 1980s. The news that the wonderful Heritage Lottery Fund has again supported us is testament to the ever-increasing significance of our work, the significance of the place and the outstanding creativity of our team. We hope this news will give a major boost to the World Heritage Site bid."

Stuart McLeod, Head of HLF South East, said: "The Historic Dockyard at Chatham is an extraordinary site that charts Britain's impressive naval history. We are delighted to be supporting the Command of the Oceans project which will dramatically improve the visitor experience at Chatham and reveal important archaeological finds for the first time."

The HLF grant unlocks a further £4m including a substantial £3m contribution from the Homes and Communities Agency. To find out more, please visit <http://www.thedockyard.co.uk/News?newsarticleid=389>.

To receive the latest information about Chatham Dockyard, its defences and the project to make Chatham a World Heritage site, you can receive their newsletter directly as well as invitations to meetings. Joining the Chatham World Heritage Partnership is free of charge and by telephoning 01634 331176 or by contacting the group at [chathamworldheritage@medway.gov.uk](mailto:chathamworldheritage@medway.gov.uk) or at [www.chathamworldheritage.co.uk](http://www.chathamworldheritage.co.uk)



The latest news from the KAS Hon. Press Officer Paul Tritton.

## Bringing history to life in north Kent graveyards

Another 1,653 memorial inscriptions ('MIs') recorded at seven parish churches and cemeteries in north Kent have been added to the Kent Archaeological Society's website, bringing the total number of parishes and villages covered across the county since the project began ten years ago to nearly 300. Several of the records have been transcribed from antiquarians' notes dating back to the 1760s. The older the notes the more valuable are they, because with the passing of time many MIs become completely illegible due to weathering and ivy growth, or are permanently lost for a variety of other reasons. As most MIs commemorate at least two individuals, tens of thousands of people are recorded on the Kent site.

The latest postings include MIs from what is arguably the most famous churchyard in fiction, immortalized by Charles Dickens in *Great Expectations*. St James, Cooling, on the Thames marshes, is reputedly where orphan Pip recalled, 'As I never saw my father or my mother, my first fancies regarding what they were like were unreasonably derived from their tombstones.' Escaped convict Abel Magwitch pounced from behind one of them, terrifying Pip by demanding food and a file to remove his leg irons. Cooling church is a major tourist attraction for Dickens enthusiasts and is six miles from his country house, Gadshill Place, Higham, where he died in 1870. In real life the tombs are those of the Comport family. Nearby there are 13 body stones, including 'five little stone lozenges' marking the graves of what Dickens imagined to be those of Pip's siblings. Cooling village also has a special place in history. Its castle was originally owned by the Cobham and Oldcastle families and is now the home of bandleader Jools Holland.

Transcriptions of the wills of many people buried in the north Kent graves are on the website, as are photos of MIs, family histories, census returns, directory entries, and death and funeral reports. The MIs, recorded between 2007 and 2013, cover All Hallows (All Saints), Chatham (St Mary's Church - where Charles Dickens once worshipped), Cooling (St James), Frindsbury (All Saints), Hoo (St Werburgh), Rochester (St Nicholas Cemetery) and Shorne (St Peter and St Paul). They can be found at <http://www.kentarchaeology.org.uk/Research/Libr/MIs/MIslist.htm> and <http://tinyurl.com/lupdcl>  
Among the most notable graves and MIs are ...

### **Chatham (St Mary)**

Three members of the Mills family and 12 others, including a boatman, drowned while attempting to pass through Rochester Bridge when their boat struck a piece of timber which had been placed, without warning, across an arch under repair.

Sally Dadd, 'died suddenly on her father's birthday - "Reader, take [warning]/ gone in a moment."'

William Gilbert Child, Colonel, 19th Dragoons, who 'having spent 19 years in India fell victim to the late fire at Chatham and died after a long and painful illness.'

### **Cooling (St James)**

John William Murton of Cooling Castle, 'who on his passage to Calcutta in the ship Monarch fell overboard and was drowned when off Rio De Janeiro' (extract from captain's log reads: 'and so perished one of the finest and best hearted seamen who ever trod a ship's deck. I have lost a trustworthy officer and a valued friend - peace be to his remains').

### **Frindsbury (All Saints)**

Michael Stanley Epps 'who died 21st October 1931 aged one day and also his brother John Francis died 14th September 1935 aged one day.'

John George Mount, '45 years in the RN ... and with Admiral Lord Nelson at Trafalgar 21st Oct 1805.'

Catharine and Susanna Anderson, wives of George Anderson, 'who hath been gunner in ten of His Majestie's ships.'

Benjamin Baker, potter, 'who suddenly met his death September 2nd 1900 ... A sudden change/I in a moment fell/I had no time to bid my friends farewell/Think this not strange, death happens to all/This day was mine/tomorrow you may fall.'

William Halls, 'late captain of the barge Trader who was drowned by being run down by the S.S. Tay in November 1886 and found July 12th 1887.'

### **Hoo (St Werburgh)**

Thomas Aveling, pioneer builder of steam traction engines, some of which were used to plough and drain the Thames marshes.

William White, 'most inhumanely murdered in the bosom of his family by a gun discharged through a window.' His son George was suspected of the murder but not charged.

David Webb and Alfred Groves, who drowned in their sleep when their barge foundered in the Thames.

The three children of William Lionel Wyllie RA (prolific marine painter and etcher), none of whom lived for more than six days.

### **Rochester: St Nicholas Cemetery**

Captain Herbert Claude Morton, 'killed in the explosion of HMS Bulwark.' The ship exploded on November 26 1914 while anchored off Sheerness, with the loss of 736 men.

John Barnaby, 'late measurer in HM Dockyard, Chatham.'

Charles Bird, 'who for 51 years was the servant of the Rochester, Chatham and Strood Gaslight Company.'

### **Shorne: St Peter and St Paul's Church**

Sarah Bevan, who left instructions to be buried in her 'usual night clothes, wrapped in a long white dress, in an inner coffin, then in a lead coffin covered with black cloth, black plates and nails' and 'kept 10 days before burial and taken to the churchyard with two black coaches to attend'.

Elizabeth and John Blackman, ten of whose children died in infancy.

John Tomlin, 'cut off in his full strength by the smallpox.'

George Bennett, bricklayer, 'in his day a famous cricketer' who played for Kent and, in 1862, for England in Australia.

Ebenezer Hollands, farmer, who celebrated two silver weddings. His first wife died in 1919 and he married again in 1921.



*The Comport burial plot, photographed c. 1903 by Catharine Weed Barnes Ward for her husband Henry Snowden Ward's book *The Real Dickens Land*.*

## *More News...*

### Henry Smetham



Members will recall the announcement in the last issue of *The Clock Tower* regarding the purchase by FOMA for the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre the Henry Smetham book, *The German Octopus*. This is one of only two copies in existence, the other being in the British Library. Smetham fan, Odette Buchanan (pictured), filled us in last time with the following, "As you all know, I'm a great fan of *Strood's local historian* and, as he was known in the Elocution Classes, *The Bard of Strood*. An amazing man born at the outbreak of the Crimean War (1854) and died just six weeks before the end of the Second World War in April, 1945. The book we purchased was written by him the previous October. This was before the full horror of what the Nazis had done and yet he was perceptive enough to berate them. (If you really aren't familiar with Henry, I wrote a short biography of him which is available at MALSC. It's called *Two Gentlemen of Strood* and also contains a short biography of another Strood character, the Rev. Caleb Perfect who was vicar of St. Nicholas at Strood during the Eighteenth Century and instigated the first workhouse in the South East of England (as distinct from a Poor House)."

We are delighted to publish the following letter in response to the FOMA donation:

8 October 2013

Dear Odette,

I am writing to thank the FOMA committee for its decision to fund the purchase of a rare book by Henry Smetham, a man who played an important part in his local community for more than 60 years. His writings on Medway's local history in general, and Strood in particular, are crucial for our understanding of the area.

We are delighted that, with your financial help, we have been able to acquire the privately published papers, the *German Octopus*, written by Mr. Smetham during the 1940s, and published just a few months before his death. The papers give a flavour of the time, and one man's response to international events. The sentiments expressed shed further light on the thought processes and character of this most interesting and influential local personality.

Please convey our thanks to members of the committee, and to FOMA in general.

Yours sincerely,

Norma Crowe,  
Local Studies Librarian, The Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre.

*Readers will be aware that Odette Buchanan is a great fan of Strood's Henry Smetham. If you want to hear more about Henry and his remarkable life, look out for her article about Smetham called, 'The Poet Laureate of Strood', which will be included in the next issue of The Clock Tower in Part Two of our special feature, Amateur Dramatics in Medway (for Part One see page 38).*

## 'Lost' photos of Medway's 'Dickens Land' found at Kent Archaeological Society

FOMA Treasurer, Jean Skilling, kindly passed on this information which had been circulated to the Kent Family History Society by Paul Tritton, Hon. Press Officer of the Kent Archaeological Society.

"'Lost' for one hundred years, a collection of photographs of places in Chatham, Rochester, Strood and nearby villages that were the settings for some of Charles Dickens's stories has been found in the Kent Archaeological Society's archives at Maidstone Museum. They were taken on glass plate negatives by American pioneer woman photographer Catharine Weed Barnes Ward who lived and worked in Kent and died in 1913 leaving 10,000 negatives of landscapes and historic buildings. More than 150 of them, taken in Kent and elsewhere, illustrated a travel book, *The Real Dickens Land* with an Outline of Dickens's Life, written by her husband, Henry Snowden Ward, and published in 1904.

All the negatives of these historic and irreplaceable photos were thought to have been lost forever - until a recent discovery by members of the KAS's Visual Records Group. While scanning and collating thousands of glass plates donated to the society over a period of many years, volunteer Ann Pinder came across a view of the ballroom at the Bull Inn, Rochester (now the Royal Victoria and Bull Hotel) credited to Catharine Weed Barnes Ward. Further research revealed Catharine's collaboration with her husband on his Dickens book. The ballroom photo was found on page 73, captioned with a description from *Pickwick*: 'A long covered room, with crimson-covered benches and wax candles in glass chandeliers. The musicians were securely confined in an elevated den'. Eventually negatives that matched 52 pictures taken in and around the Medway area for the book came to light.

The negatives had not been identified before due to an arson attack on Maidstone Museum in 1977 which damaged about ten per cent of the KAS's collections, whose library is in a room next to the one where the fire started. No one knows how many glass negatives were beyond repair and had to be thrown away when the collection was salvaged, but hundreds were saved and are now being conserved. 'Some of them were scorched and water-stained but their images can still be seen,' said Ann. The images of the Dickens locations are important because they were taken less than 40 years after he died in June 1870 and show them much as they were when he wrote his novels. Furthermore, *The Real Dickens Land* was the first book about Dickens to be fully illustrated with photographs. By coincidence the cache has come to light during a revival of interest in Catharine's work, and soon after the republication of *The Real Dickens Land* by Nabu Public Domain Reprints. Dr Margaret Denny, lecturer in photographic history at Columbia College, Chicago, hailed the discovery as 'exciting news' and said: 'Catharine set a model for women through her photographic imagery'. Professor Elizabeth Edwards, director of the Photographic History Research Centre at Leicester's De Montfort University, said: 'the find is massively exciting. Catharine did much to further the cause of photography as a suitable profession for women. I especially like her picture of the *Pickwick Room* in the *Leather Bottle* pub at Cobham - all those images on the wall!'

Catharine was born in Albany, New York State, in 1851 and started to study photography in 1886, at a time when photographic societies discouraged women members - largely because the prospect of them developing their negatives in darkrooms also used by men was considered positively scandalous. In January 1892, by now a professional photographer and journalist, Catharine met Henry Snowden Ward, editor of *The Practical Photographer* magazine in London and an authoritative writer and lecturer on the life of Dickens. Later that year, while touring England and Scotland, she surprised her friends back home by announcing her engagement to Henry, who was 14 years younger than her.

They were married in July 1893 and at first lived in London, moving to Golden Green, in the Weald of Kent, in 1901. They had worked together for 18 years until Henry's sudden death during what he intended to be a five-month lecture tour as the Dickens Fellowship's Special Commissioner in the USA and Canada.

The tour would have coincided with the Dickens Centenary celebrations in February 1912 but in December 1911, an hour before he was due to give a lecture in New York, he was found unconscious in his bed. He died of blood poisoning a few days later. Catharine returned to Golden Green but due to the shock of Henry's death and the after-effects of a road accident a few years earlier she died at home on July 31 1913. Photography historians had assumed that most of her negatives were lost or destroyed soon after she died, except for 2,202 in her archive at the International Museum of Photography in Rochester, New York State. When, and by whom, her images of Kent were donated to the KAS is not certain. They can now be seen on the society's website at <http://www.kentarchaeology.org.uk/Research/Libr/VisRec/01/Ward%20Collection%20catalogue%20V3.pdf> and at <http://tinyurl.com/prwpx3k>

**Help is always needed with events.  
If you think you could help, please contact Elaine Gardner on 01634 408595 or email  
[emgardner@virginmedia.com](mailto:emgardner@virginmedia.com)**

## *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](http://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](mailto:amanda@ajthomas.com).

**The copy deadline for Issue 34 of *The Clock Tower* is Monday 28 April 2014, with publication on Wednesday 21 May 2014.**

### Publication date

The fourth Wednesday following the editorial deadline.

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### Front Cover Accreditations and Website Information

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

The banner design (incorporating the logo) and the title *The Clock Tower* were designed by Alexander Thomas. *The Clock Tower* is also available at [www.foma-lsc.org/newsletter.html](http://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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto:bettycole@blueyonder.co.uk)

## 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](mailto:amanda@ajthomas.com). FOMA Secretary, Odette Buchanan, often receives queries from members or visitors to the FOMA website, [www.foma-lsc.org/index.html](http://www.foma-lsc.org/index.html). If you have any additional information for the following correspondents, please contact the Editor.

### Anne Pratt

From: Susan Wider  
To: Odette Buchanan  
26 June 2013

Dear Ms. Buchanan,

I am a writer in the States working on a book that includes a section about Anne Pratt. I found a copy online of Barbara Marchant's article in *The Clock Tower* about Pratt and it mentions an exhibition in September 1993 at Medway Archives. Ms. Marchant references a "small booklet containing a wealth of information about Anne Pratt and her books" that was part of the exhibition or produced in conjunction with it. I'm hoping you might be able to help me identify this booklet. Perhaps you have a copy in your holdings? If so, I am quite happy to reimburse you for any copying/ mailing charges.

Thank you for any help you are able to offer.

Sincerely,

Susan Wider.

From: Odette Buchanan  
To: Susan Wider  
cc: Amanda Thomas; Alison Cable  
26 Jun 2013

Dear Ms. Wilder,

That sounds very interesting. I didn't realize her fame had spread so far. She is very well known and much respected locally. I am fairly sure that the local archives have a copy of the booklet. I have copied in Alison Cable who is the Chief Archivist at Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre and also Amanda Thomas who is editor of *The Clock Tower*. If the Archives does not have a copy that you can access, Amanda could put out a request for one in the next edition of *The Clock Tower*.

Do keep us posted re your project.

Good luck,

Odette Buchanan.

From: Susan Wider  
To: Odette Buchanan  
cc: Amanda Thomas; Alison Cable  
26 June 2013

Hello Odette, Alison, and Amanda,

Thank you to Odette for such a quick reply and for copying Alison and Amanda. I really appreciate it!

The project I'm working on is a book for middle-grade readers (age 8-12, or so) of collected biographies of seven women ornithological illustrators that history has managed to neglect.

Anne Pratt is unique among them in that she both wrote and illustrated her book *Our Native Songsters*. I knew of her botanical work and was thrilled to find that I could include her in my bird project. When I have a bit more time I'll send you some info that I found in American publications about Anne. As Odette said, her fame

has reached quite far over here!  
Thank you all so much for your help!

Susan.

*Following this letter, Amanda Thomas contacted Barbara Marchant (pictured) and she and Susan were very soon in touch with each other.*



From: Susan Wider  
To: Amanda Thomas, Odette Buchanan  
cc: Alison Cable  
6 December 2013

Hello everyone!

Just wanted to let you all know that I am now in touch with Barbara Marchant and we have begun to correspond by mail. In fact just this morning I mailed her two chapters about Anne Pratt from two different books by American authors. I would be happy to send you copies as well, just tell me what address to use.

Barbara said that the booklet she wrote for the exhibition at Medway Archives probably duplicates material I already have so it doesn't look like I need to order that from you.

Barbara also mentioned a new article she had written for *The Clock Tower* about *My Little Dormouse*. I found a copy of Barbara's first *Clock Tower* article online. Is this second one likely to be there as well? Barbara sent me an excerpt but I would love to have the full text.

Barbara and I are also both now in touch with Anne's great-great-great nephew [...] He has all sorts of good information.

I'll try to send you updates like this from time to time.

All best,

Susan

Amanda Thomas sent Susan Wider a full set of Barbara Marchant's articles on Anne Pratt from past issues of *The Clock Tower*, which include, *Strood's Famous Botanist - Anne Pratt* (Issue 5, February 2007), *My Little Dormouse, Part One* (Issue Number 31: August 2013), *My Little Dormouse, Part Two* (Issue Number 32: November 2013).

## **Rochester Water Works**

*In the previous issue of The Clock Tower we published the following query.*

From: Dr Peter T J Rumley FSA  
To: Rob Flood, The City of Rochester Society  
4 September 2013

I would be grateful if any of your members have any photographs or information relating to the Rochester Waterworks (and Brewery) sited at East Row above Restoration House "Tudor" Garden. It was shown on Baker's plan in 1772 and a leave for a Bill from Parliament was made on 13 June 1685 to supply water. The waterworks no longer appears on the 1898 OS map, although the reservoir located on the corner of East Row and Crow Lane, was extant on the 1955 OS map. About twenty years ago two pseudo-Georgian houses were built on the reservoir site. Thank you for your consideration.

Peter Rumley.

From: Michael Baker  
To: Odette Buchanan  
cc: Amanda Thomas  
03 January 2014

Dear Odette,

Mr Rumley's request in the November issue of *The Clock Tower* for information on the Rochester waterworks caught my eye. I too have been interested in them because a Samuel Nicholson (1733-1805), from whom I am descended, was the builder and operating owner of the water works which supplied the Cathedral precincts in the 1780s for about 20 years.

Attached are extracts from Rochester Cathedral Dean and Chapter Book 7 showing land transactions in which Nicholson was granted a low rent for the land he needed. Nicholson built the first works in 1785 in response to the Dean and Chapter, following a price hike by the previous operator. It was not easy as the water became exhausted or dirty and the operation had to be moved, first in 1789. Then in 1795 there is another transaction moving the waterworks land to another party, suggesting a further move. Nicholson persevered in his role as water supplier because in his will of 1805 he left the premises to his eldest son William (1763-1852), but whether William continued the business I do not know.

From this I suggest that the water works of 1772 mentioned by Mr Rumley may not be in the same location as what appears on a 20<sup>th</sup> century map, though perhaps not very far away.

Best wishes,

Michael Baker.

#### Rochester Water Works

Chapter held on 1st Dec 1785. (Medway archives Ref DRc\_1541\_1994/DRc\_Ac\_08).

Mr Troy the proprietor of the old water works having in the year 1783, on account of the Dean and Chapter refusing to comply with a most arbitrary and exorbitant advanced price then required by him, taken up the pipes and discontinued supplying the Deanery, Prebendal, Minor Cannons, and other houses within the precincts with water, AND Mr Samuel Nicholson having at the request and for the accommodation of the Dean and Chapter and others holding houses within the said precincts at his own expense dug a Well and erected works at a piece of ground belonging to this church near the Hogshaugh in Saint Margaret to supply water to the houses from which Mr Troy had so withdrawn it, in which well and work Mr. Nicholson has expended upwards of £300. Ordered therefore that, without any fine for the same, a lease be granted to Mr Nicholson, of so much of the said piece of ground as the said well is dug and works erected on, and of so much more of the residue of the said piece of ground, as shall be necessary for the carrying on, fencing in and protecting such well and works, for the term of 40 years from Michaelmas last, the reserved rent to be one penny per annum payable yearly. It is recommended by the Dean and Chapter to their successors that Mr N has so very handsomely exerted himself for their accommodation and relied on them in the expenditure of so large a sum, that when such lease comes in course of renewal the same be renewed without fine.

Only four years later:

Chapter book 29; DRc/Ac/9, page 26-29: 1<sup>st</sup> Dec 1789

The well and works erected by Mr Samuel Nicholson on the piece of ground near the Hogshaugh on St Margaret's to supply with water the Dean and Chapter and others holding houses within the precincts of this church as Chapter minute 1 Dec 1785, not having well answered the intended purpose on account of the bad quality of the water. The said Samuel Nicholson by permission of Mr. George Gatos from the lease from this church in the name of Joseph Brooke Esq and others of (amongst other promises) the piece of land in St Margaret called the Vines is now become solely vested and with the consent of the Dean and Chapter has lately dug another well near the westernmost corner of the said Vines for the same purpose as the first mentioned well was dug, the water of which latter well appears upon trial to be of a good quality to answer the purpose of such supply. Wherefore it is found expedient to remove the said buildings and works so heretofore

erected on the said piece of ground near the hogshaugh from thence to the said westernmost corner of the Vines and the said S N having undertaken at his own expense so to do and to erect buildings and other works on a piece of ground to be set out and fenced off in the said westernmost corner of the Vines and to contain in length on the SW part thereof next Cross land 40 foot little more or less, on the SE part next the residence of the said Vines 35 ft more or less, on the NE part thereof also next the said Vines 40 foot more or less and on the NW part thereof next the garden wall of Mr Archdeacon Law 35ft more or less . And the said George Gatos having proposed to surrender the said lease in the name of Joseph Brooke Esq of a now built brick messuage with the appurtenances the said piece of land called the Vines and a slip of garden ground thereto adjoining all in St Margaret for 40 years of which 12 expired midsummer last, reserved rent £2 of the said Vines and garden ground £6, improved rent of the said messuage £20 and part of the said Vines and garden ground £7. To take a new lease of 40 years from midsummer last of all the said premises and liberty to break up the said ground to lay pipes therefrom across the said Vines towards the said Hogshaugh not exceeding 25ft in distance from the garden wall of Archdeacon Law. Ordered therefore a new lease in name of G Gatos of the said messuage and to declare the 1785 agreement null and void. And further reordered for the same reasons that without any fine a lease. Not to be increased for reasons as before.

It looks as if these works ran into difficulties also, because in 1795:

Lease 29 June 1795 (Ibid DRc/Ele/163B).

Lease of the old waterworks in the hogshaugh in St Margaret's for 21 years from midsummer 1793. Dean and Chapter and James Roper Head of hermitage in the parish of Higham a piece of ground adjoining the hogshaugh in St Margaret together with the well therein dug and made and the erection and building thereon lately erected and built and now standing and being and lately used as waterworks by Samuel Nicholson the late occupier thereof but now used or intended to be used as a stable and coach house and which said piece of land contains 29 perches ...

Nicholson persevered in his role as water supplier because in his will of 1804 (Will of Samuel Nicholson the elder, 11 Dec 1804, proved London 10 June 1805. PRO prob 11/1427.):

I also give unto my said son William all those water works in Rochester held by lease from the Dean and Chapter of Rochester and all those messuages or tenement with their appurtenances situate in Bull Lane and the small House with the appurtenances thereto on the Common held by lease from the City of Rochester to hold to him his executors appurtenances and assigns for the remainder of the terms to come in the leases under which I hold the same subject to the rents and covenants therein contained.

I have not found whether William (1763-1852, the eldest of five sons of Samuel) continued the water business.

To conclude, there is the following extract from MALSC's CityArk:

DRc\_Dean\_and\_Chapter\_of\_Rochester\_Cathedral\_1541\_1994/DRc\_Ele\_163 on request slip.

Dean and Chapter of Rochester

Leases

Rochester B

29 ½ perches land in St. Margaret, Rochester adjoining the Hoghaugh with the well dug there and recently used as a waterworks\* lying each of St. Margaret's parsonage barn, south of the Hoghaugh and on the west side of the road from Minor Canon Row to the Archdeacon's house in the Vines. Bundle no. 270

Lessee: James Roper Head of Hermitage, Higham, esq. Term: 21 years. Rent: 1s

Conditions: 1. Grace 21 days, 2b, 9, 12, 20.6 months; 25, 28, 56, 57, 62-65.

He shall fill in and level the surface of the ground and convert the present building there into a stable, at his own expense. Detailed map on deed

\*By Samuel Nicholson. See also DRc/Ele 119 and 144. This lease specifically excepts a piece of land 80' x 17' lying to the south of the 29/2 perches land leased. Date: 29 June 1795;

Quantity: 1 document.

## Restoration House and the Pilcher Family

From: Peter Watts  
To: friendsofthevines@hotmail.co.uk  
20 Oct 2013

Good day to you.

I wonder if you could advise me whether there are any books or publications that are available to purchase regarding the history of the occupants of the Vines. My wife's family, the Pilchers, once resided in The Vines and were a prominent family in Rochester. A Roger Pilcher took a lease on some land attached to Restoration House in 1660 and his descendant, also called Roger Pilcher, was Mayor of Rochester in 1745. Edward Pilcher born 1728 was a resident of the Vines and when he died in 1800 he left a vast sum of money and property including the Vines to his heirs. You could make a movie from the exploits of Edward's son's life (Edward Paul) and his siblings and descendants. Unfortunately, this wealth did not come down the line to my wife's family! We are resident in Spain and so cannot research the family or the Vines in person in England. Any assistance would be really appreciated.

Best wishes,

Peter Watts.

From: friendsofthevines@hotmail.co.uk  
To: Peter Watts  
21 Oct 2013

Good afternoon, Peter,

Thank you for your email - how interesting!

I don't know of any books that are specifically about the history of residents, but if you are happy for me to forward on your email, I can pass it on to the City of Rochester Society, and also the current owner of Restoration House who may have more information, or be interested to hear about the details you have.

There is a group called the Friends of Medway Archives who may be able to help you too. <http://www.foma-lsc.org/> I know one of their members did a talk on the history of The Vines a couple of years ago.

Drop me a line to let me know if you are OK with me forwarding your email on.

Kind regards,

Sarah Anderson, Secretary, Friends of The Vines; [www.friendsofthevines.co.uk](http://www.friendsofthevines.co.uk)

From: Peter Watts  
To: friendsofthevines@hotmail.co.uk  
21 Oct 2013

Good afternoon Sarah,

Thank you very much for your prompt reply and I would be delighted if you pass my email onto others that may be able to assist me.

My initial interest started with Edward Pilcher who owned the Vines and died in 1800. In his will, he acknowledged an illegitimate child Francis Scrimmes who was born in Cobham in 1785 and left him a considerable inheritance. Francis married a vicar's daughter in Barnstaple (who was connected to nobility) and had 2 children. He purchased a commission in the army and fought alongside the Duke of Wellington in several battles during the Peninsular wars and at the battle of Toulon. On returning to England he decided to start another family with my wife's ancestor Mary Ann Hanson. He had 4 children with her and lied about his name at every baptism. When he died he left the majority of the estate to his legitimate children but left a pension to Mary Ann provided she did not remarry and acted with due propriety!!!!!!! Edward's legitimate son Edward Paul (who also owned The Vines) married the mysterious Mrs de Vial. The following website explains how this devious woman deceived everyone she came across. This woman links the family to Percy Shelley the poet, Mary Shelley (Frankenstein).

<https://sites.google.com/site/maryjanesdaughter/home/mary-jane-s-daughter>

Thank you once more

Best wishes,

Peter.

From: Sarah Anderson

To: Odette Buchanan, Robert Tucker (Restoration House), Christine Furminger (City of Rochester Society).

24 October 2013

Dear all,

I've had a couple of emails (copied below) from someone [...] I said I'd pass his emails on, and suspect that you are the best people to ask! Odette, I came to the talk you did a couple of years ago, but can't remember if you mentioned specific residents in the area.

Kind regards,

Sarah Anderson, Secretary, Friends of The Vines.

From: Odette Buchanan

To: Sarah Anderson; Robert Tucker (Restoration House), Christine Furminger (City of Rochester Society)

Cc: Jean Skilling; Amanda Thomas; Tessa Towner.

14 November 2013

Sarah - Hi ,

No - I didn't mention any Vines residents in my talk. I've copied in Jean, Tessa and Amanda - all three are members of the Kent Family History Society and may well be able to help. Also, Amanda is editor of *The Clock Tower* and she can post this enquiry in the next edition - someone may well have helpful info. Hope all is well with the Friends of the Vines.

Regards,

Odette.

### **Tracing Ancestors in Rochester**

From: Peter Robinson

To: Odette Buchanan

23 November 2013

I have been told by Kent History services that they do not have any information to help me but that you may be able to assist me in my search for information on my ancestor. The Odd Fellows seem to be a lost group as I think in history they were a prescribed organisation and were closed down. I have copied the e.mail I sent to Kent below in the hope it might trigger some thoughts.

I was not aware that I had any connections with Kent or indeed Rochester until I came across a plaque presented to one of my ancestors. My home town is Cambridge though I now live in Oxshott, Surrey. I am hoping that you may be able to give me some information on the organisation of The Society Of Odd Fellows and perhaps even a contact for the organisation if they still exist. I have not been able to find anything on the web that has helped me. My name is Peter Rencher Robinson and the plaque reads – ‘A token of respect to Brother Thomas Rencher this piece of slate is presented for his uniform good conduct to the Society of Odd Fellows at Rochester 1808’. I know that my middle name was a surname at some point in the past but it may be that only his two forenames were used and not Robinson. Any information you may have would be gratefully received.

Thank you.

Peter Robinson.

From: Odette Buchanan  
To: Peter Robinson  
Cc: Alison Cable; Jean Skilling; Amanda Thomas; Tessa Towner  
24 November 2013

Dear Mr. Robinson,

Kent were unable to help you because Rochester is now part of Medway Unitary Authority which is separate from Kent.

There may well be references to the Odd Fellows of Rochester in Medway Archives. I have copied in our chief archivist. I have also copied in the editor of our quarterly newsletter - *The Clock Tower* - we often have success with requests for help in tracing ancestors and she will put your query in the next edition. I have also copied in two of our committee who are members of Kent Family History as well as Friends of Medway Archives. They may well be able to point You in the direction of an helpful website.

Good luck - kind regards,

Odette Buchanan.

### **WWII Evacuation - Urgent Appeal**

From Steven Durbidge  
To: Amanda Thomas  
18 November 2013

Shepherdswell with Coldred Parish Council

Amanda,

Sorry to trouble you but I'm writing a short piece for our village which includes the evacuation of 17 or 18 Richmond Road, Gillingham Infant School pupils to Shepherdswell (Sibertswold School) in 1939. I wonder if you could help me to contact or read memories of someone who was evacuated to Shepherdswell?

Many thanks in anticipation!

Regards,

Steven Durbidge, Parish Clerk.

### **Austin Budden**

From: David Veall  
To: Odette Buchanan  
25 November 2013

Dear Odette,

Austin Budden was my wife's Great Uncle, his brother Alfred was her Great Grandfather. Their Father James Budden was the High Constable of Rochester and was a Licensed Victual and landlord of the Red Lion public house. He was the Budden of Budden and Biggs brewery. We have no pictures of Alfred or James. I did find one news record of James as High Sheriff visiting Queen Victoria at Osborn house. Any information would be of great interest to [our] family.

Kind Regards,

David Veall.

## **The Cavell Van**

From: Simon Shreeve  
To: Amanda Thomas  
15 December 2013

Dear Amanda,

Another very enjoyable edition this November !

Regarding Jean Skilling's article beginning on page 27, I attach [the following...] by way of a possible footnote. Jean Skilling (*The Clock Tower*, November 2013) mentioned how in 1919 crowds at Sittingbourne and Rainham witnessed the passing of a train conveying the body of Nurse Edith Cavell and later one carrying the body of Captain Algernon Fryatt. What they would have seen were trains with the same South Eastern & Chatham Railway four-wheeled utility van which, following expert restoration, was dedicated at Tenterden Town station on the Kent & East Sussex Railway on 10 November 2010, 90 years to the day that it had also been used to convey the body of the Unknown Warrior from Dover to Victoria before interment in Westminster Abbey on 11 November 1920. A plaque near the entrance to Platform 8 at Victoria marks the event. The van itself can now be seen at Bodiam station.

With best wishes, for Christmas and the New Year.

Simon Shreeve, Hon Editor, The Old Roffensian Society Ltd (King's Rochester).

## **Carving on Esplanade Paving Slab**

From: Christine Furminger (City of Rochester Society)  
To: Bridge Clerk  
02 January 2014

Dear Sue

I wonder whether you can help me - I have drawn a complete blank on this small point of local information so far! There is a figure "8" carved into a flagstone of the pavement of the Esplanade, situated quite near the front of the Rochester Bridge Trust offices. I assume it is a mason's mark, perhaps denoting the source of the stone, but no-one seems to know. I am pretty sure I have seen one somewhere before but can't remember where and I think at some time someone has told me the meaning. My father was a master plumber and a magpie so far as building information was concerned, so he may have told me, but he is no longer around to question!

Kind regards,

Christine Furminger, Secretary, City of Rochester Society.

From: Sue Threader  
To: Christine Furminger  
January 08 2014

Dear Christine

Happy New Year! I am afraid I can't help you with this one. I have sometimes wondered whether that mark has any significance myself but no-one here seems to know anything about it. Jim Gibson is away at the moment but he may know something and I will ask him on his return. Sorry I can't be of any help this time.

Regards,

Mrs S.E.P. Threader CEng BEng MICE; Bridge Clerk (Chief Executive), Rochester Bridge Trust.

From: Christine Furminger  
To: Various (including FOMA committee members)  
8 January 2014

No-one has a clue what this is! The Guildhall Museum posed a question about it in their Christmas quiz for staff members without knowing the answer ... consequently, I have been searching ever since. I located a mason's mark on a medieval building in Belgium which appeared similar but that is as far as I have got. (Most masons' marks involve a sequence of straight lines rather than curvy ones). If anyone has information there are a large number of people very keen to know!  
Christine.

From: Odette Buchanan; To: Christine Furminger  
January 08 2014

Christine - Hi -

I haven't got a clue but would you like me to refer this to Amanda Thomas, the Editor of *The Clock Tower* - we often get answers from FOMA members or non-members who access back copies on line?

Regards,

Odette.

### **Rosamund Spong (née WALTER)**

From: Ken Walter  
To: Amanda Thomas  
03 February

Hi Amanda,

I was just reading the last *Clock Tower* again before filing it! In your *Editor's Footnotes* you mentioned the illegitimate liaison between King Charles II and Frances Teresa STUART. There is some substance to this assertion; she died on 21 January 1840 and was buried on 29 January at Aylesford aged 92, with her husband John SPONG (who died in 1815), in a vault on the south side of the church. The inscription reads: "Universally respected and esteemed also Rosamund his wife, who died on the same day of the same month 1840 aged 92 years. ORTA CAROLO REGE." The final three words in Latin translate as *Descended from King Charles*. How about that then?!!

Best wishes,  
Ken Walter.

From: Amanda Thomas  
To: Ken Walter

Ken,

Crikey. Well spotted and thank you! It just goes to show, the researchers on *Who Do You Think You Are?* know what they are up to!!! (See the previous issue, no. 31, August 2013, and the *Editor's Footnotes* about my experiences researching on *Who Do You Think You Are?*).

Amanda.

## *The MALSC Volunteers Morning and Christmas at MALSC*

Amanda Thomas



*Amanda Thomas is a freelance writer and public relations consultant. Born in Chatham, but now based in Hertfordshire, she belongs to several historical organisations, including the Kent Family History Society, the North West Kent Family History Society, and The Council for British Archaeology; she has a degree in Italian from the University of Kent and is a member of their alumni association. Amanda was made a full member of the Society of Women Writers and Journalists in 2008.*

The 2013 Volunteers Morning was a more formal affair on 27 November last year with sixteen attendees seated around a large conference-style table in the archives. The session was led by Local Studies Librarian, Norma Crowe. Norma began with a review of the work and projects undertaken by volunteers in 2013. First in the spotlight was stock work and an overview of the digitisation of glass plate negatives by Roger Smoothy and Roy Moore. At the meeting, Roger confirmed that he would also be re-photographing the Leonard Hill negatives which Bob Ratcliffe had gone through and listed. This would be a more effective way of archiving such a delicate and important collection. Steve Cross had worked on a transcription of crew lists and shipping registers and Richard Boorman had listed and sorted the Shorts Collection ephemera. Jill Payne and Pauline Weeds had worked together on much of the processing work which had been necessary, labelling and tidying, processing photographic prints, and also listing and checking the ephemera files, particularly in the Biography section. They had also looked at which photographs in the collections had been duplicated. An index of advertisements in various directories and guides had been made by Doris Herlihy. Elaine Gardner had listed the cassette tapes, and Tessa Towner had continued the work indexing the Medway men who had died in World War One.

The Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre (MALSC) is well known for its wonderful exhibitions and events which take place throughout the year, but none of these would be possible without the work and dedication of the volunteers. In 2013 Pauline Weeds and Jill Payne had worked on the *Time and Tides* exhibition. Jean Lear had worked on *Water Everywhere: Kent and the 1953 Floods*, and the *Louis Brennan* exhibition. Special thanks went to Janet Keates, who is not a regular volunteer, for her exhibition of *Cliffe and the Marshes*. Janet has been an invaluable link for MALSC with heritage groups on the Hoo Peninsula. Brian Joyce had undertaken school project work, and Tessa Towner and Brenda Paternoster (who sadly was not able to be present at the meeting) had run the half day family history courses for beginners. Norma also thanked the many people who man the Kent Family History Society weekly helpdesk at the MALSC, and who include Colin Allen, Brenda Burchell, Brian Butler, Tony Clarke, Steve Cross, Hazel Harvey, Jean Skilling, Tessa Towner and Brenda Paternoster. Last, but certainly not least, Norma very kindly thanked Amanda Thomas for her work on *The Clock Tower*. She also thanked Alex Thomas and Rob Flood for the FOMA website and the work currently underway to re-design and improve our on-line profile, and, of course, all the Friends of Medway Archives members, the committee and contributors.

The future for MALSC looks bright and there will be plenty going on in 2014. One very exciting project is the publication of e-books on line. This is an idea which Medway's Community Librarian, Richard Pemberton, has been discussing with the Local Studies department and will involve the scanning of material such as town guides, and literature and photographs from MALSC's many exhibitions. The aim is that these e-books could then be borrowed on line for a three week period. Any work which is borrowed cannot be permanently saved which is important when protecting the copyright of works held by MALSC. This would broaden the scope of e-book lending and would be a wonderful advertisement for Local Studies and the Medway Archives.

Norma concluded the meeting by thanking all the helpers and volunteers, without whom MALSC and FOMA would not be the success they are today. The last word went to a leading (and unnamed) academic who had visited MALSC earlier in the year. He had told Borough Archivist Alison Cable that MALSC was a "marvellous place," and that he had loved the fact that the place was so lively and busy.



*The volunteers, from left to right: Norma Crowe, Roger Smoothy, Betty Cole, Bryan Joyce (behind is MALSC's Catharina Clement), Colin Allen, Brian Butler, Pauline Weeds, (behind is MALSC's Alison Thomas), Jill Payne. Doris Herlihy, Tessa Towner (to the right of Tessa is Jean Lear, obscured, and leaning back, Alex Thomas), Tony Clarke, Brenda Burchell (obscured), Jean Skilling and Elaine Gardner. Photograph, Amanda Thomas. More photographs can be found on pages 47 and 48.*

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Christmas began on 4 December at MALSC last year with the annual open day. Even though the event was supposed to begin at 10.30 am, the archives was already bursting with visitors by this time. Many were making purchases at the bookstall which didn't just include a fantastic selection of second hand books, but also maps, prints and a huge box of old photographs. At the back of the main room, stalls had been set up for the visiting societies. These included the City of Rochester Society, the North West Kent Family History Society, the St Mary's Island History Group, the Higham Village History Group, the Chatham History Society, the Brompton History Research Group, the Strood Fellowship, the Kent Family History Society, the Snodland Historical Society, and, of course, the Friends of Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre (FOMA). It was possibly one of the best open days ever for the Medway Archives, not just because some considerable sums were changing hands at the book stall, but it was the first time that many of the people from the various organisations had been brought together, and the ideal opportunity for exchanges of information, and many impromptu meetings.

After mince pies, tea, and then a very nice lunch at the newly opened Pizza Express in Rochester, my son Alex and I returned to the Archives for the afternoon's entertainment: *Little Lord Clifton* and *Bowled Over*. This stage adaptation, a series of readings, had been devised for MALSC by Julie Garton and the first performance had taken place in 2005 when the project to catalogue Cobham Hall's Darnley Archive was completed. The programme accompanying the afternoon's performance explained the background to the work:

*The surviving records relating to Cobham Hall and the Darnleys are very extensive. They cover a wide range of subjects, and because of their scope, they offer us a unique insight into the workings of a medium sized estate for more than two centuries. They capture aspects of the lives of individuals, from the Darnley family themselves to the lowliest of employees on the estate. The Darnley papers were deposited and catalogued in two stages. The first portion was listed in 1958, and contains mainly title deeds, estate records and accounts. The second part of the collection was catalogued in 2004 with assistance from the Heritage Lottery Fund. It comprises family papers, within which are a large number of letters sent between family members. A number of these personal letters were used to devise the two plays you will see today.*

The players were ably led by Local Studies Librarian, Norma Crowe, and the Archives had been transformed into a miniature theatre with Cindy O'Halloran in the 'wings' coordinating music. *Little Lord Clifton*, sub-titled, *A Coming of Age, 1775-1781*, was performed by Norma, as Little Lord Clifton, Jean Lear, as Mary Countess of Darnley, Mrs. Norbury, Dalton (a maid) and Mr. Angelo. The third actor was Christoph Bull who played Lord Darnley, Reverend Norbury, Mr Halifax (a specialist from London), and Dr. Biddle. The performers read from the letters which had been exchanged by the Darnley family when their son (Little Lord Clifton) had left Cobham Hall to attend Eton College. The correspondence contained many frivolous discussions, such as how Lord and Lady Darnley were cross with their son for eating two (rather than one) rolls for breakfast, an act made worse by the fact that they were hot and spread with butter. On a more serious note, Clifton's parents were also concerned about the debts the boy was running up. The letters also contained the news of Lord Darnley's death and how Clifton inherited the title, later to be known as The Magnificent Earl. It was a fascinating insight into Victorian life and the concerns of the aristocracy, livened up by the different voices and accents of the performers, the costumes, props and - at times - outrageous mannerisms.

Thus was the stage set for the second part of the performance, *Bowled Over*, the story of Clifton's descendant, Ivo Bligh (played by Christoph Bull), and his passion for cricket. In this second half, Norma had been transformed into an elderly Lord Darnley, Jean played Florence Murphy, Ivo Bligh's future wife, and Christoph also read the part of Reginald Shirley Brooks. The characters marched onto the stage waving flags whilst cricket bats, stumps and a ball had been added to the props to enhance the telling of the story of The Ashes. The letters between Ivo, Lord Darnley and Florence gave an extraordinary insight into the personal background to the origins of Test Cricket. Australia had beaten England in London in 1882 and an obituary notice lamenting England's loss had been written in the *Sporting Times*. An urn containing the ashes of a burnt cricket ball was presented to Bligh, England's Captain during the 1882-3 tour, and it was this which came to represent the rivalry between England and Australia in each Test Series. Cricket was also the backdrop for the romance which began in Australia between Bligh and Florence Murphy, a match which dismayed the Darnleys as Florrie was not a member of the aristocracy, rather the governess to the family of Sir William Clarke, with whom Ivo was acquainted in Australia. Florrie later became Lady Darnley when Ivo inherited the earldom following the death of his elder brother.

Congratulations to Norma, Christoph and Jean for their wonderful interpretation of the Darnley letters, so brilliantly put together by Julie Garton. It was a lovely start to the Christmas festivities! Photographs on pages 47 to 48.

## A Tale of Two Sptalls

Bob Ratcliffe



*Bob Ratcliffe is a retired architect. He is President of The City of Rochester Society and a local historian; Bob is also a FOMA committee member.*

*At the MALSC Christmas Open Day, there was much talk about Cindy O'Halloran's Little Gems article, The Old Sptall (The Clock Tower, Issue 32, November 2013). Bob Ratcliffe, FOMA Committee Member and President of The City of Rochester Society, has written the following as a clarification of this interesting story.*

Simon Potyn, of the Crown Inn, Rochester, founded the original Hospital of St. Catherine in 1316. It was established under the terms of Potyn's will to care for the poor, impotent and leprous inhabitants of the city. The current almshouses stand at the top of Star Hill but this is not the original building. At first the hospital stood within Eastgate next to the site of the Star Inn, and here it remained until 1805 when the present building was erected on Canterbury Road (now New Road). This site was considered to be more airy and commodious. The new *Sptall* had twelve apartments and the residents received an annual handout of coals, candles and money from the proceeds of the original endowment. A plaque over the east elevation states that: *The ancient hospital of St. Catherine founded in Eastgate by Simon Potyn of the Crown Inn in this City 1316 was removed to this spot and this building erected 1805 with a legacy of the late Thomas Tomlyn of this City, Gent.. To which was added a donation by the Executors of the late Joseph Wilcocks Esquire.*

St. Catherine's was not the only sptall or almshouse in Rochester. Another *hospital* for the care of the poor existed on the Maidstone Road, though little is known of its origin. It is shown in a water-colour of 1848 (see below) and was bought for the sum of £1,412 10s 0d in 1857 by the Watts Charity who demolished it and redeveloped the site in 1858. The new buildings with their ornate architecture did not meet with everyone's approval. Phippen's Sketches of Rochester described the new almshouses as 'a most heterogeneous mass of bricks and mortar we have ever had the ill fortune to contemplate.'

In the Little Gems article, Cindy O'Halloran wrote:

*The illustration, reproduced here, shows a view of the old hospital painted circa 1848. A note on the back of this painting states that it is a copy of an original in the possession of Mr Cockburn of Borstal (1918). It is further annotated with the information that the house on the right belonged to Mr Hunt, a milkman, and the house to the left belonged to a Mr Ladbury. No information is given about the latter, but his wife is noted as a laundress. The garden in the foreground, where the hedge dwellers are making themselves comfortable, was in the possession of Mr Naylor who lived on the corner opposite Thomas Street.\* This simple little painting gives us a view of a long gone building and the semi rural surroundings which vanished a long time ago.*

Today St. Catherine's is still known as such, though it has been a part of the Watts Charity and City of Rochester Almshouses' accommodation since 1975. Next time you are sitting on a bus awaiting a clear road down Star Hill, read the wording on the plaque and think of Messrs. Tomlyn and Wilcocks, as well as Potyn of The Crown.



*The old hospital of St Catherine, Rochester, painted circa 1848.*

*The Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre.*

\*Editor's Note

Bob Ratcliffe queried the reference to Thomas Street. It is important to remember that *Little Gems* takes its information from sources obtained in the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre. In this article, Cindy O'Halloran was drawing on information obtained from *A History of the Richard Watts Charity* by E. J F Hinkley and Phippen's, *Descriptive Sketches of Rochester, Chatham etc.*, 1862. Cindy explains further:

Many thanks to Bob Ratcliffe for clarifying the history of the Hospital of St Catherine and its location on Star Hill. The Old Spytall on Maidstone Road was originally known as the Old Pest House. Edwin Harris refers to it "as a very ancient brick building which, at the time of its erection was a very isolated building. The Pest House was a hospital for persons infected with any pest or contagious disease..." This hospital had no connection with St Catherine's Almshouses which was the inference in last quarter's *Little Gems*, my apologies for any errors contained in the last article. When Watts' Charity purchased the premises it was demolished make way for the current almshouses.

## Archives Update

Alison Cable, Borough Archivist



### November 2013 Stocktake

The following collections were appraised and catalogued:

P159B	PCC and vestry minutes: Gravesend St James	1897-1970
C/ES/190H	Hundred of Hoo School (mainly photos and ephemera)	1948-1991
DE 1234	Deeds for Cooling, Frindsbury, Halstow relating to Marriage settlement Stable/Kidd	1575-1888
DE1244	Rochester and Chatham Conciliation Board minutes	1906-1919
DE 1245	Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners: membership records	1866-1966
DE 1221	Deeds: Chatham, Cliffe, Frindsbury, Rochester	1795-1936

### World War I Commemorations

Whilst there will be a series of exhibitions at MALSC over the 2014-2018 period (**thanks to our volunteers**), I am also involved in a partnership project to present a gallery dedicated to Medway and the Home Front at Rochester Guildhall Museum during 2014. I am working with Steve and Andrew from the museum, under the supervision of Simon Swift (Head of Greenspaces and Heritage), to put together displays of artefacts, documents and

photographs that will help tell the story of life in Medway during WWI. This is a key priority for Medway Council and is currently one of the key focuses of the archivist's time.

### Rochester Cathedral HLF Project

I am working with the Cathedral Project team to help them access the finding aids and identify key material for their proposed Crypt exhibition, which of course, involves a lot of preparatory work for the eventual display of the *Textus Roffensis* at the Cathedral.

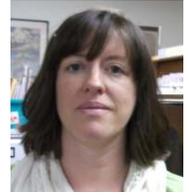
### Other News

The palaeography study day went ahead with eight attendees. This was the first time we had run the workshop with Dr David Wright, and if there is sufficient interest next year, we will consider running the workshop again.

## Keeping up with the Victorians

### Edwin Harris - Nooks and Corners of By-Gone Rochester no. 60

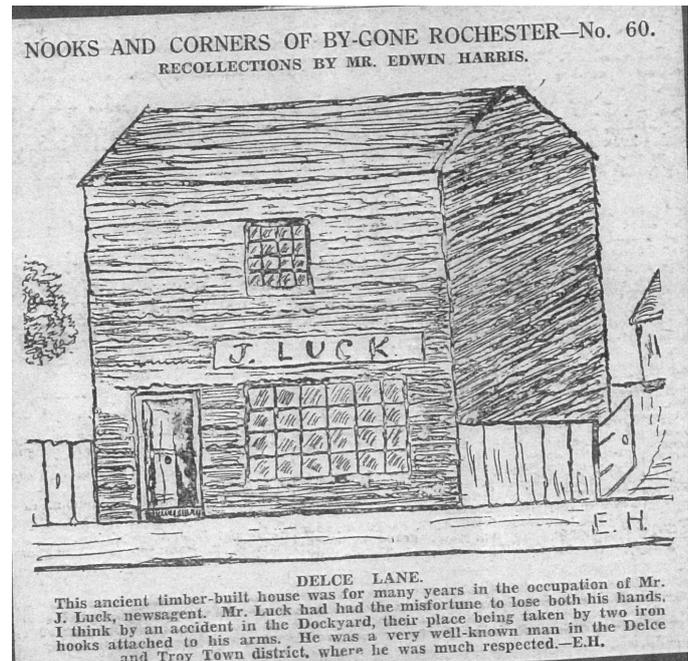
Helen Worthy



Helen is an Archives and Local Studies Assistant at MALSC, working mainly on the desk. After completing her degree in Classical Civilisation, she worked at the British Museum for eleven years. She then studied for her Postgraduate Certificate in Education and taught at North-West Kent College and Medway Adult and Community Learning Service, before leaving to teach school groups at Chatham's Historic Dockyard and work as a teaching assistant.

Appreciated for his prolific writings on the history of Rochester, Edwin Harris is perhaps less well known for his sketches. Putting his prodigious memory to good use, he drew buildings as he recalled them from his past, and whilst not all his drawings are executed with a great deal of artistic merit, they provide an important resource for local historians and enthusiasts. In some cases, his drawings provide the only known image of a building, and his handwritten notes give important details about local personalities and businesses. As always, he has a keen eye for detail, and his sketches and notes show a real affection for his subjects.

One such sketch is that of a newsagent's business in Delce Lane, which was run by Mr J Luck. The original sketch is at MALSC, and it was one of a series called *Nooks and Corners of By-Gone Rochester* in the *Chatham News*. This particular drawing was published on the 18 December 1936.



According to Edwin Harris, the newsagent's shop was situated at what is now the entrance to Foord Street in the Delce<sup>1</sup>. This area would have been very familiar to Edwin Harris, who spent his early childhood in a brick cottage on the corner of Delce Lane and the Potato Garden<sup>2</sup>, probably roughly where Ross Street is today.

John Luck was a young man when he had his first serious accident whilst working as a labourer in Chatham Dockyard. It was reported in the *Rochester Gazette*<sup>3</sup> in 1845 that a young man called J. Luck had 'met with a serious accident while employed at the planing machine, by getting his right arm entangled in the machine, and the bone was so much crushed and the flesh mutilated, as to render amputation of the limb necessary below the elbow, which operation was performed by the surgeons of Melville Hospital immediately after his admission into the Institution.' Later reports state that his arm was cut off by a circular saw.<sup>4</sup> John Luck was just 20 when he lost his arm. Despite the dangers of blood loss and shock arising from such a procedure, and with the strong possibility that it would have been performed without anaesthesia, he clearly made a good recovery, as he returned to work at Chatham Dockyard, and married in 1853. His wife, Mary Ann Rogers, was living in Delce Lane at the time of their marriage, and in the 1851 census was recorded as a servant at Mill Cottage on Star Hill for the miller William Friday.

Disaster was to strike again, however, as John Luck met with a second serious accident. In 1856, whilst working at Chatham Dockyard on a shearing machine, his other arm was torn off.<sup>5</sup> It appears that his clothes had become entangled in the machinery, and had his 'shrieks and cries' not alerted other workers, he would have been drawn into the machine. He appears to have been attended to at the scene of the accident by the two surgeons of the dockyard, Dr Bruce and Dr Peacock. He was then taken to the Melville Hospital, where the remaining part of his arm was amputated. Following a visit by the Lords of the Admiralty, John Luck, in addition to his pension of £36 10s per annum, was ordered a set of 'new patent arms', described as 'marvellous specimens of mechanical skill, fitted with flexible joints, and fingers in imitation of living limbs.'<sup>6</sup>

According to the newspaper article, the new artificial limbs enabled John Luck to dress himself, cut and eat his food, write letters and shave. They were manufactured by Mr John Newling of Grosvenor Square in London and according to the SE Gazette, 'Next to the real flesh and bone, muscle and tendon, these artificial appliances are of the utmost importance for their utility and comfort.' Despite their cost and advanced design, it seems that John Luck later replaced these artificial arms with a more traditional hook design, as Edwin Harris remembers John Luck with two iron hooks, and he is recorded as having steel hooks in a newspaper article dated 1895. Perhaps the more expensive arms looked impressive but could not offer the more practical hooks and grabbers required by a working man. Now unable to work at Chatham Dockyard, John Luck supplemented his pension by working as a news vendor from an ancient wooden building in Delce Lane. He went on to have several children, and became a well-respected local character. In 1883, John Luck's wife died, and he continued to work, supporting not just himself but also his daughter Eunice, who was an invalid.

In 1894, a vacancy arose for the post of Beadsman at Rochester Cathedral. Records in the archives here at MALSC show that John Luck, now aged 70, was keen to be appointed. As can be seen from the following document,<sup>7</sup> (see below) his dockyard pension at this time amounted to two shillings per day, and his wages selling newspapers were eight shillings per week, so any extra income or other support was to be welcomed. His application appears to have been viewed favourably, as can be seen in the following letter from Mr Belsey, Beadsman: 'Poor Luck tells me he is applying for the Bedesman's vacancy. He is a most deserving case. He lost both arms in the dockyard and has a poor daughter terribly afflicted...'<sup>8</sup> And the following testimonial from E W Willis, on Castle Club headed notepaper, gives further details about Eunice Luck: 'John Luck is a very deserving man. He has a daughter who has been confined to her bed for several years.'<sup>9</sup>

John Luck's courage and resilience in the face of adversity are all reflected in a newspaper report in 1895, when, at the age of 70 and still working, he spotted two men behaving suspiciously in a shop in Queen Street, Rochester, and appears to have disturbed two robbers.<sup>10</sup> He was a witness at the Rochester City Police Court, and a detailed account appears in the newspaper. During the attempted robbery, one of the accused struck John Luck 'a very severe blow on the head, breaking the hard felt hat which he had on,' but nevertheless he stood up to the accused, asking, 'Why did you hit me, was it because I saw you with your hand at the woman's till?' As the men took off, John Luck ran after them, shouting, 'Stop thief!' During the chase, one of the men took up a menacing attitude towards him, but John Luck 'put up the steel hook affixed to a socket on one of his arms in order to defend himself,' and the pursuit continued until both men were caught.

*re Beadsman.*

*Mr Wright, one of the Beadsman, is reported to have died this morning.*

*Mr John Luck of 58 Borden St. Maidstone Rd. aged 70 yrs - is desirous of being appointed in his place. He has had both of his hands cut off, & receives a pension of 2/- a day from the Dockyard. he sells newspapers & gets about 8/- a week for doing that. He refers us to the Mayor, Mr Willis Mr Thorncliffe and several others. he has lived in St Margarets Ch. since 1852.*

DRc/Aob 71/3

John Luck died of influenza on the 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1895<sup>11</sup>, and was buried at St Margaret's Church in Rochester on the 26<sup>th</sup> March 1895. He died intestate, leaving effects under £10 in value.<sup>12</sup> Forty-one years later, Edwin Harris drew his sketch and made notes about John Luck, a man who had earned the respect of his local community but who today is all but forgotten.

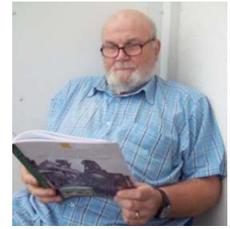
Notes

1. *Chatham Observer, Recollections of Rochester (No.2) Delce* by Edwin Harris.
2. *Recollections of Rochester, no.1* by Edwin Harris.
3. *Rochester Gazette*, Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> November 1845.
4. *South East Gazette*, 29<sup>th</sup> July 1856
5. *South East Gazette*, 9<sup>th</sup> December 1856
6. *South East Gazette*, 17<sup>th</sup> February 1857

7. DRc Aob 071/3.
8. DRc Aob 071/5.
9. DRc Aob 071/6.
10. *Chatham News*, 5<sup>th</sup> January 1895.
11. *Chatham News*, 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1895 p.5.
12. DRc Aob 071/9.

## Magnum Opus

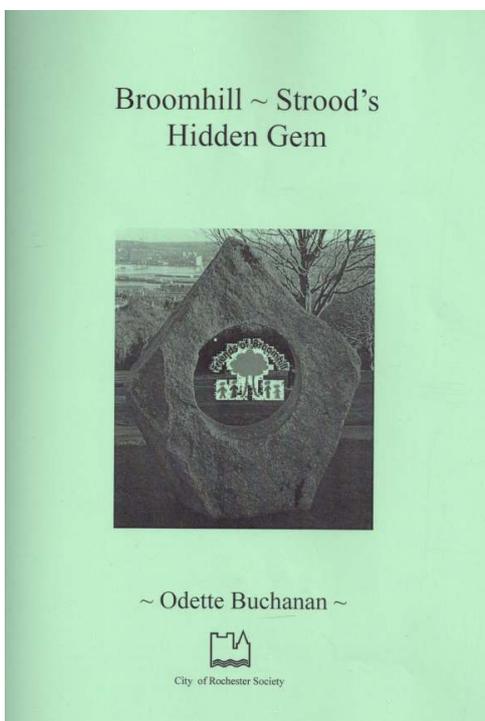
Steve Cross



Steve moved from Yorkshire to Chatham with the Royal Navy in 1977, and has lived there ever since. He was an engineer at BAe. Systems at Rochester Airport Works for 29 years, retiring in December 2008. He is now a volunteer at MALSC also a member of FOM.A and the KF.H.S. He has been researching his own family history since the birth of his son in 1985 and now enjoys helping others research their own families with the aid of Ancestry. He also dabbles in the repair and improvement of digital or scanned photographs.

### **Broomhill – Strood’s Hidden Gem.**

(Incorporating ‘Broomhill and the Battle of Britain.’) by *Odette Buchanan*



To quote the City of Rochester Society’s website: "*Odette Buchanan examines the history of one of Rochester’s highest landmarks. From the time of the Ancient Britons to the modern day Friends of Broomhill, this book charts the area’s place in history including an in depth look at its strategic importance.*" This statement sums up concisely exactly what the booklet does. It was originally put together as a talk by Odette Buchanan, to be given in libraries and to other interested groups. It was so successful and acclaimed that she was prompted to gather up all the information mentioned in the talk and make it into this booklet, adding new information as it came to light during its production.

It originally must have been a massive research project, as she has gone right back in time by at least a thousand years to give an overview of Broomhill and the surrounding area, including a description of the possible origins of its name, its native flora and fauna, and descriptions of its development during the occupation by the Celts, the Ancient Britons and their chalk-pits, through to the Anglo-Saxons, the Jutes, Romans, the medieval and Tudor periods, royal visits, diseases, civil war, Dutch and Napoleonic navy attacks, the nearby Royal Dockyard, Churches, Rochester Castle, Windmills, Dickens, and the Victorian Jubilee celebrations.

The type of information given, besides some details of national events of the time, includes what some of the local public officials got up to, what things cost at various times and what people were paid, what was done by the government and other *official* bodies in the area. It also covers rivers, canals, railways, pubs, local spies, allotments, archaeological discoveries in the area, and many interesting events such as those surrounding the local residents involved with the many local windmills in that area at the time.

There is a very large discussion on World War II with anecdotes by local people, nostalgia, personal reminiscences of local defenses and information concerning the production of aircraft in the area, which was to continue right up to the present day. There is also extensive coverage of the area’s *own* plane crash in 1940, when an enemy aircraft came down in a Broomhill field, along with information about the pilot and his life after the crash right up to his death in 2009. When he crashed, the local people working in the fields wanted to attack him, personally, with their sticks and brooms, but one particular land girl stepped in and kept the locals away until the arrival of the local *Bobby* to take him into custody (for his own good). Odette goes on to detail the actions the pilot later took to track down and thank this land girl. The trail led him to Scotland, where he was finally able to thank her with a big bunch of flowers and by buying her a sumptuous dinner.

This is then followed up with the aftermath of war and the building of pre-fabs, etc., going on to the present day and the emergence of the Friends of Broomhill, which has now become a thriving collection of enthusiastic local residents who wish to preserve Broomhill's heritage and go on to give it a well-advertised position in the modern public's eye. To anyone with an interest in the area, be it a personal residential interest or a visitor's interest, Odette provides a wealth of hard-sought and extremely interesting information, all put together in this one terrific booklet. It is profusely illustrated throughout, giving visual back-up to the textual information. Certainly a reference not to be missed.

Published: 2013 by the City of Rochester Society, price £6 (No ISBN). A4, spiral-bound with soft covers and protective celluloid sheets back and front. 48 pages, including many monochrome illustrations, maps, drawings, portraits, newspaper extracts, photographs, and diagrams, followed up with a bibliography, acknowledgments and references to sources.

Available at: [www.city-of-rochester.org.uk/shop/broomhill-stroods-hidden-gem/](http://www.city-of-rochester.org.uk/shop/broomhill-stroods-hidden-gem/)

Also available from MALSC, Baggins Book Bazaar, and Rochester Visitors' Centre.

## From Kent To Montana – The Medway Roots Of Gary Cooper

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.*

In the Christmas edition of *The Clock Tower's Archives Update* section, Alison Cable listed a document that caught my eye. It was the conveyance of a parcel of land in New Brompton dated 1896.:

DE1209/2

1. James Brazier of New Brompton, co Kent, shipwright diver; 1896  
George W Lane of New Brompton, dockyard writer and Thomas Hibbard of  
New Brompton, veterinary surgeon.
2. The Sheerness Permanent Benefit Building Society.
3. Sarah Brazier of New Brompton, co Kent, widow.

*Conveyance* of a parcel of land at New Brompton, par. Gillingham, north of May Rd. Measuring 100 x 14 feet. [Plan annexed]. Date: 9 May 1896 Consideration: £195. 1 doc.



One of the parties to this was James Brazier, a shipwright diver. His name was familiar to me, as I knew him to be the maternal grandfather of the Hollywood star Gary Cooper (pictured here in *High Noon*, (1952); Wikimedia Commons.)

The actor's grandfather was born in Aldeburgh on the Suffolk coast in 1843. The town had once been a flourishing shipbuilding centre; Drake's *Golden Hind* had been constructed there in the sixteenth century. However, the River Alde was silting up badly by the time James Brazier was born. Although James and his brother John were apprentice shipwrights in the town, lack of work forced both to leave. James was still there at the time of the 1861 census, but John had already gone, taking his skills to Woolwich. James must have headed south in the 1860s, because his two eldest sons were born in Woolwich and Deptford. The Royal Dockyards there both closed in

1869, and the brothers moved again, this time to north Kent. In 1871 and 1881, John was living on Luton Road in Chatham, and James was in Green Street, Sheerness. The latter became a diver while working at Sheerness Dockyard. His three youngest children, including Alice Brazier, the mother of Gary Cooper, were born in the town.

Some time in the 1880s, James Brazier moved from Sheerness to the larger Yard at Chatham, where he continued to work as a *shipwright diver*. By the time of the 1891 census, he had acquired property in Mill Lane (later renamed Windmill Road) in New Brompton. He was recorded as living at 3 Aldeburgh Villas. John Brazier, his brother, resided at No 1 with his own family. The Suffolk men were clearly determined that the name of their home town should live on in their adopted one.

James Brazier appears to have taken an active part in the life of New Brompton. He became a prominent freemason and a director of New Brompton (later renamed Gillingham) Football Club. In the mid 1890s, he gave up his Dockyard career to become a partner in Brazier and Hibbard, house and estate agents.

Gary Cooper's grandfather died in 1901. James Brazier's widow Sarah continued to live at what was now numbered as 138 Windmill Road (pictured here; photograph by Brian Joyce).



Meanwhile in the early 1890s, James' daughter Alice, listed as a dressmaker in the 1891 census, had gone to the USA, initially to visit her brother Alfred who had already emigrated. Alice Brazier decided to stay in America. She soon met and married Charles Cooper, an Englishman from near Dunstable in Bedfordshire. Cooper, who had been in the USA for ten years, had trained as a lawyer, and in 1892 was admitted to the Montana bar. He went on to become a judge in the town of Helena. Alice Brazier, the Gillingham dressmaker, had married well. The actress Myrna Loy, herself a native of Helena, remembered the Coopers living in an elegant house. In 1906, the Judge bought a 600 acre ranch north of the town, and rented a further 2000 acres from the US government. Alice later claimed that she did her share of work around the ranch, pitching hay, shearing sheep and branding cattle.

The Coopers had two sons. The younger, Frank (later renamed Gary by his Hollywood agent), was born in 1901. Two years later, Alice took the two-year-old and his brother Arthur to England, presumably to enable their grandparents to meet the new toddler. The future film star presumably made his first visit to Windmill Road during this trip.

Alice worried that life on the Montana ranch was having a coarsening effect on her sons. In order to counteract this, the Coopers decided to give the boys an English education. Dunstable School in Bedfordshire (possibly the Judge's alma mater), was chosen, and in 1910, Alice and her sons arrived in England. While waiting for term to start, Frank and Arthur stayed with Alice's widowed mother in Gillingham. Since the Windmill Road house had been built, the Royal Naval Hospital had been constructed opposite. The future Gary Cooper's view from his grandmother's house was this institution's vast red brick wall, a far cry from the vast open spaces of his native Montana.

In the 1911 census, Alice and her sons were listed as staying with Judge Cooper's family near Dunstable. Presumably, the American boys were day students at the school. The three returned to the USA in September 1912. Frank completed his education in Montana and Iowa and then managed the family ranch in Helena. After Judge Cooper retired in 1924, the whole family moved to Los Angeles, where Frank eventually found work as a film extra. It was at this stage that his agent recommended he change his name to Gary. By 1930, Alice Brazier's son was starring in films and remained a major star for the next thirty years. Although Gary Cooper subsequently visited England several times, I have found no evidence that he revisited Gillingham. Presumably the local press would have pounced on this if he had. However, his father did visit the town, and this alone was newsworthy. Charles Cooper arrived in England towards the end of a world tour. He had never been to Gillingham before, and during the Christmas season of 1936, met with his wife's relatives in Chester and Marlborough Roads.

Meanwhile, Alice remained close to Gary in California; she appears to have been a possessive and protective mother. Clara Bow, the *It Girl*, one of Cooper's lovers, asserted that, "His mother ran his life." Alice appears to have disapproved of all of his relationships with women, including his wife Veronica; she seems to have been instrumental in breaking up many of his relationships. The actress Lupe Valez, another of his lovers claimed that, "Every time Gary did not do as his mother wanted him to do, she became ill. She is just trying to hold him by sickness." Alice broke up that relationship, as she did in the early 1950s when her son temporarily left his wife for the actress Patricia Neal. The star claimed later that, "the axe of Alice Brazier Cooper went right through my heart."

The former New Brompton dressmaker maintained a high profile in Hollywood, and was often seen at social events with her son. She even made an appearance as herself in a 1946 film, *Breakfast in Hollywood* (aka *The Mad Hatter*) alongside the mother of Joan Crawford. The reader may watch this film in its entirety on *You Tube*



Gary Cooper died at a comparatively young age in 1961. Alice Brazier Cooper outlived him by six years, dying in a California nursing home at the age of ninety four. One wonders what would have been the fate of the woman the columnist Hedda Hopper described as “a rather snobbish English Episcopalian” had she remained in Windmill Road.

*An advertisement in the local press; Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre.*

#### Editor's Note

If you enjoyed this article by Brian Joyce, you may also like to read again *The Rosher Family: From Gravesend to Hollywood* by Amanda Thomas (*The Clock Tower*, Issue 9, February 2008, available on the FOMA website: <http://www.foma-lsc.org/Downloads/Issue%209.pdf>)

# A Clock Tower Special Feature

## Amateur Dramatics in Medway

### Part One

*“Merely Players...”*

*Glimpses into the history of amateur dramatics in Chatham and Rochester*

Irina Fridman



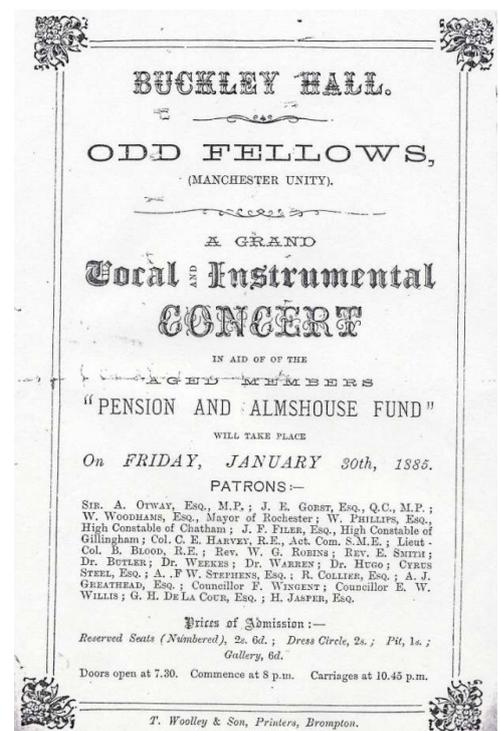
*Irina joined the MALSC team in 2005 as a Local Studies Librarian. Her responsibilities include looking after the Local Studies collections at MALSC and the 16 libraries in the Medway authority, taking particular care of the collections' maintenance. Reflecting Irina's love for literature, she is responsible for the Local Authors' collection and Dickens' resources at MALSC; her other responsibilities include work with local schools and various ethnic communities of Medway. She is also looking after online Medway Images database.*

*Irina is a member of the Medway Little Theatre (MLT). The bulk of the information in the article below comes from the theatrical ephemera at MALSC (mainly local newspapers) and a DVD MLT Story, produced by the MLT.*

“Ladies and gentlemen! Please, take your seats – the play is about to begin.” “I know that maid! She’s my neighbour!... Isn’t he great as Mitch?!... Shhhh...” Enthralled we’re watching the performance, following the twists and turns of the narrative. It is not a West End production, but a play performed in Medway by a group of amateur enthusiasts, a group which has a long and distinguished history. Where did it all begin? Let’s go back to the Victorians.

October 1872. Local news: “A commodious lecture-theatre and concert room is now in course of erection contiguous with the Soldiers’ Institute, in this garrison, with which it is connected, for the use of officers and both men of the navy and army. In which theatrical performances, concerts, popular lectures... may be given.” The funds come from the Soldier’s Institute, supplemented by subscriptions and donations. The reasons for building the theatre were simple – the large reading room had become so frequently a lecture-hall or a room for the performance of private theatricals, that the readers were often shut out of it for the whole week. As you can imagine, the army men, eager to have uninterrupted access to the books, got so short tempered, they almost started rioting. One of the senior officers – Major Buckley, full of understanding and compassion, initiated a campaign to build a new Garrison Theatre. It took four years to complete the project.

December 1872. The Garrison Theatre (later also known as The Buckley Theatre), “a pretty little building” (according to the local newspaper), which could hold 600 patrons, was opened by Major General Brownrigg. The last touches were completed just before the audiences arrived; but although the paint was scarcely dry, and a slight smell of dampness pervaded the building, “it presented a very pleasing appearance.” The stage had appropriately been covered in Union Jacks and a carpet.



*A flyer from the Buckley Theatre, The Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre.*

The theatre staged performances by various groups. Amongst them in 1873, to much critical acclaim, the Brompton Excelsior Dramatic Club presented *B.B.* – an Original Farce in one act. The piece was written in 1860, and was one of the earliest by Sir Francis Cowley Burnand, contributor to and later the editor of *Punch*, in collaboration with Montagu Williams.

In the same December in the ramshackle Royal Marine Theatre (rumour has it that it was founded by the famous David Garrick in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century) the officers of the Royal Marines held a night of entertainment. It consisted of the principal piece, *Court Cards*, a comic drama in two acts, adapted by J. P. Simpson from a French play *La Fileuse*, some small pieces and various comic songs. It did seem to be a long night of entertainment. Try to stretch anything beyond two hours today, and no matter how jolly it is, the audience starts yawning. Before you know it, you are left with only your back stage crew and (if lucky), your immediate family, and this is only because they fear your sulky countenance for days to come. The review of the play was very favourable and the acting was rather superb. “There was a good attendance.”



*Royal Marine Officers quarters with the Globe; courtesy of Brian. Joyce.*

May 1879 saw the Royal Marines giving their opening performance in the brand new Globe Theatre on Dock Road. It was “very well fitted and a great improvement on the old wretched big theatre, which was full of men and cats, who had managed to drive men away from the building,” according to the opening speech of Col Pym. The performance was extremely well received, the actors were excellent and the audience roared with laughter. The theatre, which could seat nearly 300, proved very popular with many Medway amateur companies, among them the Kentish Players and Irene Weller Players, who performed there during the Second World War.

In 1950 the Royal Marines left Medway and the Globe became silent. A year later, persuaded by the then Mayor of Chatham Alderman F. H. Lawrence, the Royal Navy took it over. The theatre opened again on the 3 October 1951 with Oscar Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest* by the Pembroke Players. Other productions followed. The boards of the theatre saw performances by the Wayfarers (whose member Eric Copley would later have a room dedicated to his memory at the Medway Little Theatre (MLT)), the Peter Hudson Players, the Nomads, the Good Companions (two of their members, Duncan Rand and Ruth Winter, would also have their names forever etched into the history of the MLT), to name a few. During the cold and windy Februaries of the 1950s the Globe hosted Medway Theatre Guild Festivals and these were presided over by local actress, Dame Sybil Thorndike.

However, the 1950s also saw the arrival of television. Audiences attending live performances dwindled dramatically, and the Globe closed its doors forever in 1962. The much-anticipated takeover by Chatham Council did not materialise (the Council bought the Empire site instead) and attempts to save the Globe by the amateur dramatic groups did not produce the expected result either. In 1963 the theatre went under the auctioneer’s hammer and it was sold, together with Medway Terrace, for £11,500. With the Buckley Theatre

having closed already, the Globe auctioned and the Empire demolished (amongst other theatrical disasters) it looked like every theatre building in Medway was disappearing...

But, do not despair! It was not all gloom and doom! On Thursday, 9 January 1958 about 40 enthusiasts held a meeting at the Army and Navy Hotel at Chatham. The result of the meeting was creation of the new Medway Little Theatre Club. The committee members included some familiar names: Ruth Winter, Duncan Rand and Eric Copley.

In April 1958 the *Chatham News* had already reported that the Club was taking over a warehouse in King's Street Rochester, and to reduce costs the members were to convert it into a small theatre themselves. That plan unfortunately fell through, but July that year saw the Club already in possession of a lease of a former printing works warehouse at No. 256 High Street Rochester, almost opposite Rochester Railway Station. It was an early 18<sup>th</sup> century slightly dilapidated building let at a peppercorn rent to the Club by their then President, local businessman Andy Anderson.

For the next three months, Club members worked flat out to complete the conversion, at the same time rehearsing their inaugural play. On Friday, 24 October 1958 with the auditorium still being painted within half-an-hour of the first audience coming in (does this sound slightly familiar?) the theatre opened its five-night run of Terence Rattigan's *Separate Tables*. Well-wishers for the theatre's future success included Vivien Leigh, who sent a telegram.



*Volunteers hard at work in the late 1950s at what would one day be the Medway Little Theatre; Duncan Rand can be seen on the right hand side.*

For many years Dame Sybil Thorndike was a patron of the Medway Little Theatre, raising funds for it on various occasions. In 1967 she performed in the Victoria Hall, then proceeded to the Medway Little Theatre celebratory reception. That day Godfrey West was acting as a chauffeur for Lady Sybil and her husband Sir Lewis Casson. Whilst waiting to ferry them to the theatre he parked illegally outside the Hall, and in no time was nabbed by the police. Godfrey pleaded guilty. On hearing the mitigating circumstances the magistrates were placed in a quandary. Godfrey had pleaded guilty; they had to accept his plea. The result? Godfrey grinned that he was the only person in the UK to have had a suspended endorsement!



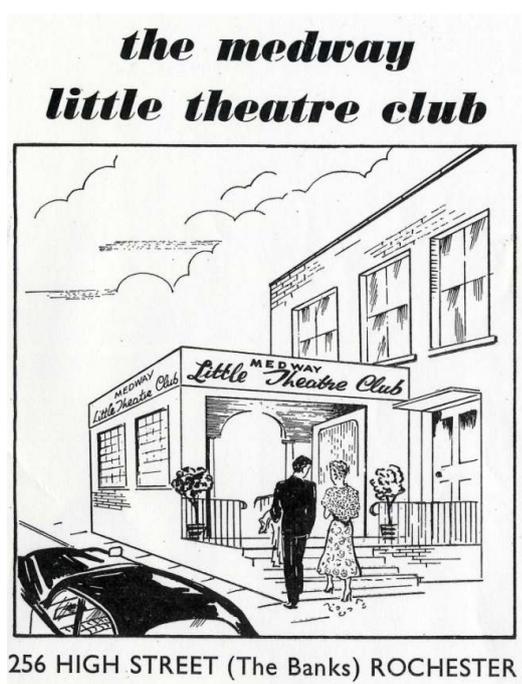
*Journey's End* (MLT 1959/60 season (2nd season)); courtesy of Dan Willis.

In 1973 Duncan Rand and another Club member Luke Taylor founded an annual One Act Play Festival, which was soon dubbed by the Kent Drama Association the “Jewel in the Crown.” After Rand’s death in 1981 the Festival was renamed The Duncan Rand Festival. The next one takes place over two weeks in July 2014 and as usual promises new and exciting performances from groups based not only in Medway but all over Kent.

In 1977 Medway Little Theatre caused a storm and hit the headlines of the national press for their performance at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival of the controversial *The Tragedy of King Charles III* written by a local playwright Paul Garnham. This tongue-in cheek Shakespearean pastiche saw the Queen abdicate in favour of Charles, who then married a barmaid. He was also suspected of murdering Princes Andrew and Edward, while England was being invaded by 200 Scots. One of the Scottish MPs was outraged: “I find the whole exercise most distasteful! And I trust that those who are putting it on will have the courage not to do so. If it does come on, it will be boycotted!” Well, it attracted a full house. Buckingham Palace seemed not that worried either, and MLT received a very pleasant letter from the Prince of Wales’ Secretary thanking the theatre for the script and noting the interest with which the Prince read the play. The next year the group was in the epicentre of yet another storm with a play by the same playwright, entitled *The Rapist Reinstatement Scene*.

Through the years the theatre had its money-struggles, threats of closure due to area redevelopment plans and the lease expiring. However, thankfully any fears of closure were allayed in the 1990s when an opportunity to buy the freehold arose. The building was purchased after many fund-raising events and with the help of yet another of the theatre’s patrons, the late Nicholas Clay, who started his renowned acting career as a teen in MLT’s Youth Group (established by Dan Willis and Duncan Rand back in the 1960s).

Today the Medway Little Theatre, which seats almost one hundred, is in its 56<sup>th</sup> year. The worries of the 1950s that television would kill live theatre are over as every production draws many full houses. Each season consists of six plays and various productions and workshops by the Youth Theatre Group. This season the theatre joins the country in a four year commemoration of the First World War with its next production, *Mother Courage and Her Children* by Bertold Brecht, from 20 to 29 March 2014. Though written in 1939, in an attempt to counter the rise of Fascism and Nazism, Brecht talks about the horrors of war and the devastating effect it has on both sides: there are no winners. The play is directed by Dan Willis, the same Dan, who joined MLT in its second season and founded the Youth Theatre Group; a performer since 1964, MLT President Godfrey West also stars. Why don’t you come along and connect with the history of amateur dramatics in Medway!



From *The Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre*.

## *The All Saints' Players, Chatham*

Betty Cole



*Betty Cole is FOMA's membership Secretary. She is interested particularly in local and family history and holds a Certificate in Theory and Practice of Local History with the University of Kent at Canterbury. Betty is a volunteer transcriber and checker for free-to-access internet sites for the researching of census and parish records.*

I was musing recently on what my mother and her generation did in their spare time, time which I spend on my computer data-inputting for free to access genealogy sites. My mother made and decorated wedding cakes for people. She never read books, but rather scripts of plays and poetry anthologies. I still know by heart some very sad Victorian poems she had learned as a child and which she passed on to me. She could also recite many popular monologues such as *The Lion and Albert*, *Sam's Musket* and *Sam's Medal* which she often performed at local functions. Her greatest passion however was her local Amateur Dramatic Society.

In the 1940s and 50s Amateur Dramatic Societies were very popular. The Medway Towns had some very good ones and my mother belonged to The All Saints' Players which met in the church hall of All Saints' Church in Magpie Hall Road, Chatham. Commenting on the Players' performance of the three act play *Ladies in Waiting* in 1946, the local newspaper stated, "All Saints Players showed that they are a worthy addition to the growing number of amateur dramatic societies in the Medway Towns."

The hall where the All Saints' Players met was a large prefabricated structure immediately behind the church where the vicarage now stands. It had a purpose built stage with a dressing room at the side and facilities for making refreshments. The same hall was used by a Youth Club, the 26<sup>th</sup> Medway Scouts and for wedding receptions and social evenings. I think two plays were performed each year. My mother had a book from Samuel French Ltd. entitled *The Guide to Selecting Plays*. This listed the play books published by the company, giving the synopsis of each play together with cast size, character description, how many sets would be required etc. Once it was decided which play best suited their group the books were ordered from French's. I knew this parcel of books came to our house but knowing my mother didn't in those days have a cheque book I wondered how they were ordered. My older brother and sister tell me that they remember accompanying my mother up to London on the train to collect the books from Samuel French's shop in Southampton Street, Covent Garden. I assume she collected money from all the players before going there and perhaps she purchased a postal order. (Whatever happened to those?)

There were no auditions to join the drama group; if you wanted to join you were welcomed and most were given a part. Not all were great actors but there were no Prima Donnas and good or not-so-good they were all accepted into the group. Other church members who were shy of performing helped with the scenery, props, lighting and sound effects. The important thing was being a part of the group. There was no television to keep people at home in those days. The vicar, the Revd. David Jarvis, often appeared in the plays. They did have a producer. The one I remember is mentioned briefly in the Vestry Minutes of 18 April 1939:

"Hal Griffith thanked for his interest in the players." He must have stayed for some time for me to remember him! (*Vestry Minutes 1931-195*, All Saints' Church, Chatham, archived at MALSC).

I wondered how mum had time to learn her lines with a husband and four children to look after. I remembered that it often fell to me to help her by hearing her lines. She would underline her lines in the book and I would have to take all the other parts. Rehearsals were held in the church hall once or twice a week and more frequently in the weeks leading up to the performance date. I did ask her once how she coped with not having many clothes to wear to rehearsals and meetings. She said she kept her coat on. Fortunately for her the hall wasn't always heated for rehearsals.



*The All Saints Players perform Ladies in Waiting, 1946.*

Finally, the play would be performed to a packed hall for three nights. On one of the nights, my brother, sisters and I would be taken to watch the performance and I remember the great excitement and giggling that went on between us when my mother appeared on the stage. She was a good actress as this quote from a local newspaper's revue of *Ladies in Waiting* in 1946 shows "Ivy Caleno gave a convincing impersonation of a bluff Yorkshire woman, so good that one wondered if her Northern accent was assumed. She was responsible for many of the lighter spots in the play." Her favourite play was *Heaven and Charing Cross* in which she played the mother of a young man accused of murdering his girlfriend. Other productions I remember were *Ghost Train*, *The Passing of the Third Floor Back* and *Random Harvest*.

Occasionally, the Players would perform at another venue. On Wednesday, 10 April 1946, they performed a play called *Simon Peter* by Irene Caudwell in the nave of Rochester Cathedral. A local newspaper reported "The Nave of Rochester Cathedral was transformed on Wednesday evening, when a temporary stage was erected in front of the Choir steps." They also performed at Maidstone Gaol (sic): "At the invitation of the officers of Maidstone Prison, All Saints Players, visited the prison on Sunday evening and reproduced their recent success *Charity Begins* for the benefit of the prisoners. The Players were welcomed by the prison chaplain before a large and enthusiastic audience of officials and inmates".

I hope other readers will come forward with memories of local drama groups. I remember that my mother's group used to take part in a One Act Play Festival but I don't know who organised this and where it took place. Perhaps someone will have some information.

## *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.*

### The Good Companions Club

The Good Companions Club was founded around five years before the outbreak of world war two by a group of young men and women, who started to meet to hike, swim, dance and socialise together. They decided to call themselves the Good Companions, taking their name from J. B. Priestley's novel.<sup>1</sup> At first they had no permanent home but met in private houses and hired halls. The Club, as a publicity leaflet from the time explained, was 'open to all - regardless of race and colour or political and religious creeds.' This ideal was maintained throughout the life of the Club. The members also produced a magazine, called *Sir Oracle*; and several early copies survive in the Archive collection.<sup>2</sup>

For the duration of the Second World War, the Club was inactive and returning members found that the group had been forgotten. The group reassembled in 1945 determined to continue their association and uphold their ideals. They acquired a tennis court (in Wilson Avenue?) and a year later their new clubhouse on New Road, Rochester. Many activities were offered including, drama, table tennis, bar billiards, music and theatre outings. The new building provided a bar, a lounge and restaurant for the comfort of its members, indeed so comfortable were these facilities that a later comment in the magazine stated that some members were to be found permanently in the building. During the summer months the outdoor activities offered included trips to the coast, hiking, tennis and swimming.

It seems that another successful side to the Club were the many marriages between members who had found romance at the Good Companions. Family membership was encouraged and a baby watching service was also set up. In 1949 there were around 300 members (not including children) and by 1962 the membership was reported to be 600 strong.

The club eventually closed for the last time in 1985. Frank Taylor, one of the original founders said it had "become less adventurous and more cosy. Without the energy of youth prepared to take more risks the Club could no longer maintain its innovative outlook." He was sad that the Good Companions had closed but was consoled that the club had shone so brightly for so many years and brought companionship and happiness to hundreds.<sup>3</sup>

### Notes

1. *The Evening News* 12/8/1949.
2. Medway Archive collection DE0963.
3. *Chatham News*, 1993.

## Am Dram Footnotes

Amanda Thomas



Or should that be Footlights? I grew up in the shadow of the Good Companions Club drama group, run in the early 1960s by my mother, Dulcie Jones. Dulcie met my father, Lew, at the Club in about 1954. Having recently arrived in England from Australia, he was keen to make new friends, and as he was a handy carpenter, he was soon helping out with set building for the drama group. Lew remembers Duncan Rand well, and it certainly sounds from others who knew him that he had great charisma and was a wonderful director. He was a journalist working both in the Medway Towns and in London on one of the dailies. Duncan died in 1981 but it would appear, from Irina Fridman's article, that his memory lives on. Lew also remembered Barbara Brigden, who appears in the photograph opposite. She also went on to the Medway Little Theatre (MLT), and was an employee at the Bourne and Hillier dairy on Star Hill. Also pictured are Doreen Clark and Norman Angell who later married; Peter Hudson, (sitting next to Duncan Rand) also directed.

Cindy O'Halloran was quite right that the Good Companions Club had started before the Second World War, but at that time it was known as the Gay Venturers and was based in Watts Avenue, Rochester. My aunt, Peggy Nind (née Wraight), was a keen sportswoman and a member of the club. She invited Dulcie, some nine years her junior, to join, but Dulcie's involvement didn't really take off until she had left the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in the early '50s and was *between jobs*.

By then the Gay Venturers had become The Good Companions and Dulcie must have taken over the running of the drama group around 1957, perhaps later, as it was in 1958 that the former drama group leader, Ruth Winter, left to start up the MLT with Duncan Rand and Eric Copley. Dulcie ran the group until about 1965, succeeded by Peter Antwist, though that surname may not be quite right. He had been involved with the group for some time and worked at Borstal Prison (now HM Prison Rochester). He used to bring boys from the prison to the Good Companions Club as part of the rehabilitation process, though I have no idea how successful this scheme was.

In the post-war years, amateur dramatics really did thrive in the Medway Towns, and the last word on this goes to FOMA member Tony Clarke:

"...I recall my efforts at amateur dramatics back in '49 to about '53. St. Nicholas Youth Club was in what is now the College on the Banks opposite Rochester Station. The drama group entered the Medway Youth Drama Festival with *The Tree of Wisdom* a one act fantasy in which I appeared as a Green Dragon! I then joined the Irene Weller Players. They staged their productions in the Globe Theatre, Dock Road, Chatham that was part of the Royal Marine Barracks. That site is now Medway Council Offices. Plays that I was involved in were *Traveller's Joy* in which I played the part of the airline pilot, and *On Monday Next*, a play about a dress rehearsal for a play to be staged the next week. I acted as an actor in that play (rather complicated!). That was good fun. For *Captain Carvello* the following year I was involved in the stage management.

*A flyer for the production Fumed Oak, circa 1963; from the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre.*

A yellow flyer for the production 'FUMED OAK'. The title is in large, bold, black letters. Below it, in smaller text, is 'An unpleasant comedy in two scenes by NOEL COWARD'. The cast list includes Henry Gow (BILL WHEELER), Doris (BERYL SPARKS), Elsie (ROSEMARIE JONES), and Mrs. Rockett (DAPHNE HORSHAM). It also mentions 'The action takes place in the sitting room of the Gow's house in south London. Time: The present.' and 'Produced by DULCIE JONES'. At the bottom, under 'Production Credits:', it lists Stage Manager PETER BUTLER, Lighting TOMMY THOMAS - JIM DEAR, and Costumes DOREEN HOLROYD - JUNE MORRISON. The footer reads 'Kent Messenger - Maidstone'.

**FUMED OAK**

An unpleasant comedy in two scenes  
by **NOEL COWARD**

Henry Gow ... .. BILL WHEELER  
Doris ... .. BERYL SPARKS  
Elsie ... .. ROSEMARIE JONES  
Mrs. Rockett ... .. DAPHNE HORSHAM

The action takes place in the sitting room of the Gow's house in south London. Time: The present.

Produced by **DULCIE JONES**

**Production Credits:**

Stage Manager  
**PETER BUTLER**

Lighting  
**TOMMY THOMAS - JIM DEAR**

Costumes  
**DOREEN HOLROYD - JUNE MORRISON**

Kent Messenger - Maidstone



*The Good Companions Club drama group circa 1959/50. Back row from left to right, Stan Rand, Mary Matthews, Harold Scammell (or Scamrell), Esme Coole, Frederick Bassett, Joan Walter, Arthur Edwards, Joy Hayden; middle row, Jimmy Walker, Doreen Clark, Peter Hudson, Duncan Rand, Lorna Crine, Norman Angell, Barbara Brigden; front, Lilian Drayson and Ted Hansted. The Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre.*

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## *The FOMA Collection*

*The collection consists of documents purchased at various times by FOMA, for deposit at the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre.*

The latest purchase is as follows, a conveyance relating to Reed House, Strood:

DE1209/5

1. William King of Brighton, co. Sussex, M.D and F W Bushill of Marylebone, co. Middx.
2. Hon. Francis G Molyneux of Strood, Kent.
3. James Wickens of Cavendish Square, co. Middx.

*Reconveyance* [further to a mortgage] of a newly erected messuage called Reed House, now in the occupation of Francis Molyneux, in par. Strood. *Inc.* Filbert Orchard and meadow in par. Frindsbury. Formerly part of Reed Farm.

Consideration: £2500.

Date: 25 Nov 1851. 1 parchent.

## *The Committee*

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The Very Reverend Dr. Mark Beach  
Dean of Rochester



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Russell John Race, JP, DL (pictured)

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## *The MALSC Volunteers Morning and the Open Day*

*Right: at the November 2013  
Volunteers Morning at MALSC, Colin  
Allen has a chat with Catharina  
Clement.*



*Middle right: The open day gets under  
way on 4 December 2013.*

*Below: At the open day Catharina  
Clement asks guests to sign in, in this*



*case Christoph Bull.*



*Right: At the open day, FOMA members  
Dr Andrew and Mrs Brenda Ashbee at  
the stall for the Snodland Historical Society  
([www.snodlandhistory.org.uk](http://www.snodlandhistory.org.uk)).*



*Photographs, Amanda Thomas.*

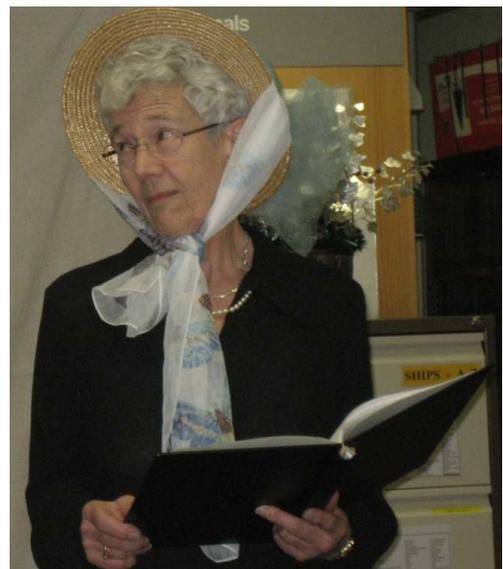
## Amateur Dramatics in Medway



*The players (Norma Crowe, Jean Lear and Christoph Bull) come on stage for the second half of the afternoon's performance at MALSC. The archives had been transformed into a miniature theatre with Senior Archive and Local Studies Assistant Cindy O'Halloran (pictured, seated) in the 'wings' coordinating music. See page 38.*

*Below left: Norma Crowe as Little Lord Clifton in Little Lord Clifton, A Coming of Age, 1775-1781.*

*Right: In Bowled Over, Jean Lear played Florence Murphy, Ivo Bligh's future wife.*



*Photographs, Amanda Thomas.*