

**Medway Tourism Association Meeting
Wednesday 25 March 2009**

Commissioner's House, Chatham Historic Dockyard

Attendees:

Bill Ferris	MTA Chairman
Councillor Jane Chitty	Medway Council
Councillor Susan Haydock	Medway Council
Councillor Herbert Crack	Medway Council
Councillor Julie Shaw	Medway Council
Ed Woollard	Medway Council
Simon Curtis	Medway Council
Mark Dowling	Tourism South East
Malcolm Moulton	MAPs/Roch Choral society
Tony Hill	Medway Theatres
Catherine Perepelytsya	Medway Council – Maritime Heritage Trail
Mary Sewell	Medway Council
Richard Holdsworth	Historic Dockyard, Chatham
Bill Fowler	Historic Dockyard, Chatham
Anthony Morse	Historic Dockyard, Chatham
Sarah Hirsch	Dickens World
Richard Dunn	Royal Engineers Museum
Jeremy Kimmel	Royal Engineers Museum
Rebecca Nash	Royal Engineer Museum
Peter Boreham	Guildhall Museum
Steve Nye	Guildhall Museum
Andrew Freeman	Guildhall Museum
Joanne Cable	WHS & Great Lines Heritage Park
Annie Harvey	Rochester Cathedral
Sylvia Nimmo	Six Poor Travellers House
Mike Peevers	Brook Pumping Station
Mike Page	Medway Sailing
Sarah Belsom	Medway Council – Heritage Officer
Tracy Stringfellow	Medway Council – Roch/Upnor Castles
Robin Burfoot	Town Crier
Bob Ratcliffe	City of Rochester Society
Alan Moss	City of Rochester Society
Chris Furminger	City of Rochester Society
Wendy Meshier	Medway Renaissance
Vanessa Roth	The Balmoral
Doug Hilton	Buckland Lake
Tamsin Hilton	Grebe Cottage Self-Catering
Tamara Bent	Diggerland
Sandi Digby	Footsteps in Time
Matthew Arnold	Arriva Southern Counties
John Megoran	Kingswear Castle paddle steamer
Guy Peto	Medway Ports
Wilf Lower	European Maritime Events

Chris Pullman	Buckmore Park Karting Circuit
Sian Fowler	Churchfields B&B, Rochester
Kevin Farrelly	Orchard Cottage B&B
Sue Farrelly	Orchard Cottage B&B
Carly Hunt	Royal Victoria and Bull Hotel
Sanjeev Mall	Royal Victoria and Bull Hotel

Apologies:

Dr Mark Hampton, Santosh Mall

Chairman's Introduction

Bill Ferris welcomed the members and after introductions remarked on the strong turn out and variety of tourism businesses and organisations represented. He reiterated the importance of tourism in the current economic climate and the need to work ever more closely together in partnership. He also stated that it was important for him and Simon to feedback industry views and concerns to strategic tourism bodies such as VisitBritain, Tourism South East, and VisitKent.

A Museum for Medway – Presentations and Discussion

Simon Curtis introduced a discussion on the potential for a new dedicated Medway Museum, which had been proposed for discussion by Councillors Herbert Crack and Susan Haydock. Representatives from the three core museums gave brief presentations.

Richard Dunn outlined the collection and remit of the Royal Engineers Museum. The main aim is to highlight the importance of the Royal Engineers collection of circa one million items by presenting the collection in a coherent way and to maximize investment in the attraction itself. The collection ranges from large items such as tanks and bridges, to medium sized artefacts such as models as well as smaller objects such as medals, and textiles.

Richard updated members on a potential £4.5 million project to move the Royal Engineers library and archive collection into the main museum building and to build a new suite of galleries and recreational spaces. Richard emphasized how integral the collection is to the history of Medway, much of which has been inaccessible for many years. He did warn that the cost of developing a new museum would be extremely expensive. For example the Imperial War Museum North cost £35 million to build even with a free site provided. The Royal Engineers Museum would today cost around £60 million to rebuild and is very costly to run, as are all museums.

Richard Holdsworth presented on the Historic Dockyard and added that the Royal Navy and Dockyard had also had a substantial impact on the history of the local towns. Comprising of 80 acres and over 100 buildings, the Historic Dockyard tells the story the Dockyard and shipbuilding, the Navy and its influence on the Medway towns. The core galleries are the Wooden Walls, the Ropery (newly re-presented), Slip 3 (recently opened), Lifeboat Museum, and

the 3 Warships and the museum of the Royal Dockyard. The specialist library and archive collection is also housed in the main museum building. Richard outlined the National Museums at Chatham (£12.5 million) project to house some of the best maritime-based collections of the Imperial War Museum and National Maritime Museum, and the opening of a touring exhibition space of international quality. This will open in Spring 2010.

Peter Boreham gave a brief outline of the Guildhall Museum, in Rochester. The collection was established at the end of the Victorian period when the people of Rochester had set up a museum in Eastgate House. Since 1979, and the museum collection has been housed in the Grade I and II listed Guildhall and Rochester conservancy buildings. The collections are immensely varied and of a very high standard and include everything from stuffed birds to silver ornaments. The museum receives 60,000 visitors per year and the main focus of the museum is on social history. Peter gave an update on plans for a new project called 'Opening the Doors,' which includes a new High Street entrance, new introductory gallery, and other galleries focussing on the river and its importance, as well as future regeneration. The education and outreach service is a core service of the museum. This modest, but significant £0.25 million project begins this autumn. He reiterated the importance of conveying the history to an ever-changing population and that how vital it is for the museums to retain distinctiveness whilst branding themselves together. Peter mentioned that the new Liverpool museum had cost £75 million.

Councillor Herbert Crack reflected on the important and immense history of the area, which is currently exhibited and interpreted at the museums in Medway. His concern was that much of the history was not portrayed at museums in Medway such as the aviation history (Short Brothers), and the industrial heritage of Medway.

He emphasized that this was a long-term plan, and that often, it was in difficult financial times, that future plans were formulated. He gave the removal of the remaining Aveling and Porter building as an example of the loss of industrial heritage of the area.

Councillor Susan Haydock reiterated the importance of the current museums, but highlighted the gap in representation of the industrial heritage of the area including the history of the lives of local industrial workers. She highlighted the importance to the local area of the cement works, the brick works as well as the heritage of Aveling and Porter and the Short brothers, all of which, she felt are currently underrepresented. She argued that the many existing reserve collections could be exhibited in redundant buildings to add to the museum offer of Medway. To further the debate Cllr Haydock set out 3 areas of discussion for the group:

- Was there a need for a new museum?
- Would it be viable?
- Where would it be sited?

Bill Ferris argued that in his capacity as chairman of the Association of Independent Museums (whose aim is to help museums become sustainable) he was aware of museums becoming untenable a long time before the recession. He argued that there are more good ideas than practical ideas. He felt that there was definitely a need to capture the industrial history of Medway, but that it was much more complex to argue whether a new museum would be viable. He mentioned Lord Browns plan to have a Museum of Britain, which linked up all the collections across Britain by technology. The importance is about telling stories about places and people and not just about exhibiting objects.

Councillor Jane Chitty added that the museums we have are increasingly becoming museums of real value, and that it would be more useful to carry out a precise audit of what we need to preserve. She argued that what was needed to be interpreted, could probably be done at the sites we already have.

Malcolm Moulton felt that we needed a heritage centre rather than a museum linking the past to the present and used the example of the proposed aviation heritage centre at Rochester airport. This is in formative stage, but may be the best outlet we have at the moment.

Richard Holdsworth explained that there were 2 separate issues being discussed; to preserve the elements of Medway's past that we are losing, and to build a new structure to put them in. He argued that museums need to be based on collections and he questioned whether there really was enough surviving material to make a viable and interesting new museum. He felt that the priority between all of us was to try and save what we have.

Peter Boreham argued that most industrial heritage and objects tend to be very large, and difficult to store. Most of the objects are probably no longer in existence or spread across national museums. Peter maintained that what is of most interest is the story behind the industries, which can be found in archives and conveyed using technology such as Websites and touch screens.

Doug Hilton felt that people did want diversity when they visit a destination and that the identity of an area is important. In bad weather it becomes increasingly important to have several under cover sites to keep visitors in the area.

Mark Dowling suggested working with the local universities to capture local social history in order to create a virtual museum rather than spend too much time and money on the objects themselves. He felt that it would be important to do this as soon as possible.

Bob Ratcliffe reported that some oral history projects were being undertaken by the Medway archives and local studies centre and that there was already some recording of older residents memories etc. He mentioned the high-

speed rail link digs and that the artefacts from these were being stored in Maidstone.

Sandi Digby made the point that the Guildhall Museum is currently closed on Mondays due to revenue budget reductions and argued that perhaps we should be investing in what we already have, and widening access, rather than spending money on new projects.

Mike Page asked what feedback we had from visitors with regard to gaps in the product. Simon Curtis replied that our main weakness was not in the heritage or museum field, but rather regarding the shopping and eating out offer we have.

Bill Ferris summarised the points made, saying that it was evident that the stories of local people was of utmost importance, but that funding was the big issue. He reported that the last round of HLF bids were 5 times oversubscribed with no projects getting over £5 million and that it was costly running the museums that we already have. He argued that most museums need subsidies and support to exist and need to look at creative ways of conveying the local history. We also have to be practical. He argued that the Medway brand was already a difficult product to market and that we need to work in a coordinated way with the council tourism team and lobby for funding. He recognised the support from Cllr Chitty and the Council in relation to tourism.

Councillors Crack and Haydock thanked the MTA members for the opportunity to discuss this issue and acknowledged that building a new museum was not appropriate at this point in time, but restated that we need to think about the long term and try and save what we are potentially losing of our heritage.

National Armed Forces Day – 27th June

Bill Fowler outlined the exciting plans for the National Armed Forces Day taking place on the 27th June. This event has grown from Veterans day to include the whole Armed Forces and that Chatham has been awarded the prestigious national event. The Historic Dockyard will be the hub site for the occasion.

The event will attract veterans, cadets and members of the armed forces and include assets and displays by the Royal Navy, RAF, and army along with music, entertainment and have-a-go activities. On the 27th entry to the Dockyard will be ticketed, but free, allowing about 30,000 people entry to the Dockyard that day.

The day starts with a tri-service parade through Chatham town centre to the Dockyard with some of the aforementioned activities taking place in parallel and into the afternoon. The MOD are planning fly throughs, helicopter rides, the Red Arrows, a Battle and Britain memorial flight, which residents and visitors will be able to view from all points along the river. There will also be

events in Medway in the preceding week including modern army unit displays at the Royal Engineers museum, films and shows at the Central Theatre, afternoon cruises on the Kingswear Castle. Fort Amherst, the St Georges Centre and the University will also open to the public that week.

Kevin Farrelly asked whether programmes and event details could be made available to MTA members.

Bill Ferris replied that, as they were working with several different organisations it was difficult to obtain exact information on what was being provided by the MOD, but that as soon as more detailed information was available that Ed would circulate details via the MTA circular emails.

Bill reported that the events of the 27th would be reported by BBC News 24 service and that the aim was to put the Dockyard and Medway on the map and that he was determined that the benefits would be spread across the whole of Medway.

Cllr Shaw expressed concern about traffic and road closures as well as parking issues. Bill responded that road closures would be minimal and that park and ride sites would be available on the day and that there were discussions with Arriva, Kingsferry and the train operators taking place. Matthew Arnold added that Arriva were augmenting bus trips from Chatham to the Dockyard and that veterans and members of the armed forces would travel free.

Tony Hill enquired about ID for veterans and members of the Armed Forces and Bill Fowler replied that there is clear ID for Armed Forces members but that identifying veterans may be more difficult. He suggested a set of questions such as which regiment etc they had served in. Ex-dockyard workers are also being treated as veterans.

Anthony Morse reported that detailed Website information would probably be ready after Easter and leaflets will follow after this. He asked members to log into the Dockyard Website for regular information. If MTA members need a supply of leaflets later on they can contact the Dockyard.

Members Update

Simon Curtis updated members that a consultation period had now opened (until May10th) regarding the future of Rochester Castle. Those interested can find information on the "Visiting Medway" section of the Councils Website www.medway.gov.uk/tourism under the Rochester Castle section. There is a display on the subject at the VIC.

He also reassured members that the Visitor Information Centre was safe and that although the building was being sold we would be leasing the ground floor as a VIC. The Arts Gallery will also be moving down to the ground floor in June.

Simon gave a brief update on the marketing and mentioned that he was commissioning a short film about Medway to be shown at the VIC, and used on the Website and other Web presences. He also mentioned that we had attended a number of travel trade shows recently and that Medway was hosting a familiarisation trip as part of the Coach Tourism Council conference on 3rd April.

Malcolm Moulton updated members on the Rochester Choral Society event taking place on the 13th June and that a modest information centre had been set up by the Medway Aircraft Preservation Society at Rochester Airport.

Bill Ferris mentioned that in celebration of the 25 yrs of the opening of the Historic Dockyard there would be a 25 gun salute on the 1st April and that tickets had been reduced to 1985 prices of £1 – to be purchased only on that day!

The Meeting was followed by ‘Fish and Ships’ - a Fish and Chip Supper on aboard HMS Cavalier in celebration of British Tourism Week.

MTA Meeting dates planned for next year:

Thursday	23rd July 4pm	Garth House, Rochester Cathedral
Thursday	19th November 4pm	Royal Engineers Museum