

## **PLANNING COMMITTEE**

**13 JANUARY 2021**

### **CHATHAM RAGGED SCHOOL**

Report from: Richard Hicks, Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive

Author: Dave Harris, Head of Planning

#### Summary

This report sets out the Grade II Listed Building designation for Chatham Ragged School following a successful application by Planning and Conservation Officers.

#### 1. Budget and policy framework

- 1.1. There are no budget and policy framework decisions arising directly from this report. This is an information item for the Planning Committee.

#### 2. Background

- 2.1. The Ragged School is located in King Street in Chatham, and was designated a Grade II Listed Building on 21 April 2020 following an application for designation to Historic England from officers of the Council's Planning Department in September 2019.
- 2.2. The school was constructed in 1858 to help provide an education for Chatham's poorest children, pre-dating the 1870 Education Act which introduced free, mandatory elementary education. It is estimated that over 600 Ragged Schools (some sharing the same building) were open by the time of the 1870 act, with very few still standing, and just 12 of them (including Chatham) being Listed.
- 2.3. The application for the Listing was made following a planning pre-application discussion for redevelopment of the school site, with one of the options being demolition of the school building. Due to its historic and architectural value, the school was considered a Non-Designated Heritage Asset (NDHA) and of local importance; providing an insight into how Chatham developed as a military and naval town but suffered from pockets of overcrowding and poverty throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, notably in the locality of the Brook. Whilst the school was considered a NDHA, it falls just outside of the Brompton Lines

Conservation Area and therefore benefitted from some, but rather limited protection from demolition.

2.4. Officers recognised the social importance of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Ragged School movement so undertook research into Chatham's own Ragged School. A speculative link to Charles Dickens was found, with Dickens himself spending part of his childhood in Chatham, and even living on the Brook nearby. With so few examples of purpose built Ragged Schools in existence and a possible link to Charles Dickens, it was considered that the school could potentially be worthy of national designation and an application for Listing was prepared.

2.5. A full copy of the Listing Description is provided as an appendix to this report, but are also available on the Historic England website at the following address: <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1468892>

### 3. Advice and analysis

3.1. This report is submitted for information and make members aware of a new Listed Building.

### 4. Risk management

4.1. Identifying nationally important buildings, sites and areas, and also those that have particular local value and significance, directly assists in the on-going conservation, enhancement and celebration of our rich historic environment.

### 5. Climate change implications

5.1. There are no climate change implications arising directly from this report.

### 6. Financial implications

6.1. There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

### 7. Legal implications

7.1. There are no legal implications arising directly from this report.

### 8. Recommendations

8.1 The Committee is requested to note this report.

### Lead officer contact

Dave Harris – Head of Planning

Tele no: 01634 331575

Email: [dave.harris@medway.gov.uk](mailto:dave.harris@medway.gov.uk)

## Appendices

A) Historic England Listing Description.

Historic England Listing Description for Chatham Ragged School, taken from:  
<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1468892>

### **Location**

Statutory Address: King Street, Chatham, Kent, ME4 4LX  
District: Medway (Unitary Authority)  
Parish: Non Civil Parish  
National Grid Reference: TQ7609167956

Summary: Former ragged school, built 1858 to designs by J Young. Extensions in the late C19 and C20.

### **Reasons for Designation**

The former Chatham ragged school, of 1858, is listed at Grade II for the following principal reasons:

Architectural interest:

\* In its architectural modesty the building is evocative of its original function, its interest enhanced by the simple but effective polychromatic brick date in the gable ends, the carved stone sign over the door and the foundation stone set within the interior wall, embedding a ready understanding of its history within the fabric;

\* Despite alterations, the building's distinctive original plan is legible and the principal elevations survive well, as does the open character of the school room.

Historic interest:

\* As a rare surviving example of a purpose-built ragged school and thus representing a movement which popularised the idea that all children should have access to education irrespective of their means or background;

\* As a didactic C19 vestige of the Brook area of Chatham, known for its slum conditions during that period.

### **History**

Prior to the 1870 Education Act and the subsequent introduction of free, mandatory elementary education, poorer children relied heavily on schools run by religious, charitable and philanthropic institutions for education. Amongst the children of the poor working classes however there were those for whom even the modest fees required and the basic standard of respectability needed was beyond them. These were the children of destitute parents, or orphans; those who lived in the direst poverty, in some cases on the streets. There were philanthropic individuals who sought to reach such children, one of the earliest known examples is a school established by Robert Raikes in Gloucester in 1783. Other figures such as Thomas

Cranfield and John Pounds were influential in what became the ragged school movement, but their activities were on a small, localised scale. This changed with the founding of the Ragged School Union in 1844.

The Ragged School Union was formed in London, uniting the 19 existing ragged schools in the capital and encouraging the foundation of new ones nationally, particularly in large naval, military and industrial towns. The Union publicised the work of ragged schools, popularising the term as well as the concept, and acted as an advisory body for those who wished to establish new schools. It was a lecture delivered by Mr Ware, Secretary of the Field Lane School, Holborn, at the Chatham Mechanics' Institute which inspired the establishment of the Chatham ragged school in April 1849 (Maidstone and South Eastern Gazette, 3 July 1849). The Chatham ragged school opened at a small house on Queen Street, off the Brook. It quickly outgrew this location and the school moved to several other sites in the Brook area until the committee resolved in 1856 that subscriptions would be opened to erect a new school. After some false starts securing a site, the War Office gave the committee use of a piece of land at the top of King Street on the edge of the Chatham Lines measuring 50 by 100 feet, and £20 towards the cost of the building. By the time the school's foundation stone was laid in October 1858, £250 had been raised but a deficit of £150 remained to cover the total cost of the building at £400 before fitments. This deficit was later cleared through a fund-raising bazaar held in 1860. The building's architect was named in newspaper accounts as Mr J Young, who gave his services at no cost, and Mr Foord was reported to have agreed to construct the school on favourable terms. The town plan of 1866 provides a useful schematic plan of the building, which shows a large single school room and a range of small cellular rooms to the rear, possibly stores and washrooms.

Chatham was both a military and a naval town. Its population grew massively in the C18 and C19 and with this came the attendant problems of overcrowding. The area around the Brook, a stream originally known as the Old Bourne, became more densely populated and the stream itself increasingly polluted. This once desirable area went into steep decline and by the early C19 it was synonymous with poverty, overcrowding and squalor. Ragged schools were established in the areas where there was the greatest need for their services and in the case of Chatham, this was amongst the slums of the Brook. The school operated into the late C19 and possibly the early C20, although the date at which it closed has not been established.

Ordnance Survey Maps show that by 1898 a long narrow extension had been built at right angles to the rear of the original building. The school continues to be labelled as such in the 1903 map but by 1932 it is referred to as a hall, and by 1954 a neon sign works. In the 1980s a second floor was added over the original range of back rooms and over the late-C19 range. The building was later used as a pipe works and most recently as office accommodation and storage. At some point the chimneys were reduced below the roof line and roof slates were replaced with concrete tiles. The Brook area retained a poor reputation into the C20, and in the 1930s the majority of it was demolished as part of a slum clearance programme. The ragged school building is a vestigial survival of the area's pre-C20 fabric.

The building's architect, J Young, is almost certainly John Young (1830-1910), son of Joseph Young, 'one of the oldest and most respected of our townsman at Chatham'

(South Eastern Gazette, 24 January 1860, p 6). John Young was articled to Lewis Vulliamy, then assistant to James Williams and later to Thomas Henry Wyatt before being elected to the RIBA in 1860 and starting his own practice in London. He worked in London, Kent and Essex and is known to have designed the Ebenezer Memorial Building in Chatham, 1860, (South Eastern Gazette, 24 January 1860, p 6) and Chatham cemetery, 1868, as architect to the Local Board of Health in Chatham Extra (Maidstone Journal, 3 August 1868, p 1).

Accurate statistics relating to the number of ragged schools established in the C19 are difficult to come by as many may not be documented and some were short-lived. The numbers affiliated to the Union (which were mainly in and around London) rose steadily between 1844 and 1870 and at the peak in 1869, over 600 schools were recorded (divided between day, evening and Sunday schools, many sharing the same buildings). From 1870 successive acts established a national education system, the payment of fees came to an end and new standards for schools were established. Support for ragged schools fell into decline and with that so did the number of schools. The last ragged school in London closed in 1910.

Many schools taught from existing buildings taken on a lease, but others like Chatham were purpose-built. The number of purpose-built examples is not known but their modest form is likely to have left them vulnerable to alteration and loss. Chatham ragged school appears to be relatively well documented in the contemporary press and all potential sources of information have not been exhausted for the purpose of this List entry. A speculated link with Charles Dickens, who was an active supporter of education for the poor and spent part of his childhood in Chatham, is at present tenuous. Dickens served as President of the Chatham Mechanics Institute, where Mr Ware held his lecture in 1849, and he is known to have visited the Field Lane School in the early 1840s. In 1856 it was reported that a public meeting was to be convened to present plans and raise funds for the new Chatham ragged school building and that as well as 'local friends', prominent figures in the ragged school movement, including the Earl of Shaftesbury (President of the Union) and Mr Charles Dickens were to be invited (West Kent Guardian, 24 May 1856, p 3). A subsequent report of this meeting does not mention Dickens in attendance however (West Kent Guardian, 26 July 1856, p 3).

## Details

Former ragged school, built 1858 to designs by J Young. Extensions in the late C19 and C20.

**MATERIALS:** the building is of yellow stock brick construction with red brick bands and dressings on a rendered plinth. The roof is covered in concrete tiles. The windows of the school room are multi-pane iron casements and windows to the later extensions are timber casements and sliding sashes.

**PLAN:** built on a hill running upwards to the north-east, the original building is rectangular in plan, its wide front elevation facing south-east. The plan comprises a tall single-volume space (formerly the schoolroom), approximately a double square in plan, entered via an internal lobby; a shallow pitched roof originally ran down to a catslide across the rear over a range of five small cellular rooms. Internally this

arrangement largely survives, albeit with some reconfiguration of the small rooms, but the catslide has been removed and a second floor with a flat roof added over the small rooms. A narrow single-storey brick-built range was added at right angles to the rear in the late C19. This was later extended upwards with the addition of a flat-roofed first floor (possibly at the same time as the second floor was added to the rear of the original building). A small single-storey extension has been made at the end of the extension.

**EXTERIOR:** the front elevation is a simple, symmetrical, three-bay arrangement. There is a central gable-ended bay with a tall, wide doorway (with a later door) with red brick dressings and segmental arch. Above is an inset stone sign, again with red brick dressing, carved with the words 'RAGGED SCHOOL'. To either side is a tall multi-paned iron-framed window with red brick segmental head. The bays are framed by wide, shallow brick piers.

The side elevations have three window openings, those to the south-west retaining their iron windows and those to the north having had the openings bricked up. Both gable ends display the date, 1858, in coloured brickwork. The south-west elevation continues northward beyond the original building with yellow stock brick at ground floor, reflecting the late-C19 extension. The first floor has rough-cast render. The rear elevations are painted render at ground floor and rough-cast above.

**INTERIOR:** the main door leads into a shallow entrance lobby with a door to either side, entering into the single open space of the former schoolroom. The walls may have originally been whitewashed or plastered but are now bare brick, seemingly having been sand-blasted. At the wall heads are small ventilation hatches with wooden covers.

A carved stone foundation stone reads: THIS STONE / WAS LAID BY / HARRIET / LADY OF/ SIR FREDERICK SMITH, K.H / M.P. TO THIS BOROUGH / OCTOBER 7th 1858

There are two chimney breasts, one in each half of the room, positioned in the spine wall between the schoolroom and small rooms to the rear. The fireplace openings survive but not original surrounds.

A free-standing steel mezzanine has been inserted into the north half of the space and the floor lowered to accommodate this.

The roof has queen-post trusses and markings on the rafters suggest the original lath and plaster ceiling was vaulted, with the trusses exposed up to collar height. Above collar height there is some pipe-work, possibly vestigial remains of gas lighting system. The original ceiling has been removed and a boarded ceiling inserted at tie beam level.

The rooms to the rear of the schoolroom have had some remodelling, seemingly two opened up to form one, one made into a through route out to the rear of the building and one made accessible from the outside only. Markings on the 1866 plan suggest that two of these rooms might have been wash rooms with corner coppers. They are now toilets and stores with late-C20 finishes and fittings.

The rooms in the late C19 extension are now used as offices and have modern finishes. The upper rooms were not inspected.

## Sources

### Books and journals

Bartley, G C T , The Schools for the People, (1871), pp. 382-390  
RIBA, , Directory of British Architects, 1834-1914, (2001), p. 1090  
Seymour, C, Ragged Schools, Ragged Children, (1995)  
'Obituary, John Young' in RIBA Journal, , Vol. 17, (1910), 702

### Websites

Greater London Industrial Archaeology Society, Who Built the Dairy at Crouch Hill?, accessed 17 January 2020 from <http://www.glias.org.uk/news/182news.html#K>

### Other

Kentish Gazette, 8 September 1857, p.  
Maidstone and South Eastern Gazette, 3 July 1849, p. 6  
Maidstone Journal and Kentish Advertiser, 12 October 1858, p.  
Maidstone Journal and Kentish Advertiser, 16 March 1858, p. 6  
South Eastern and Maidstone Gazette, 10 October 1854, p.  
South Eastern Gazette, 12 October 1858, p. 6  
South Eastern Gazette, 14 August 1860, p.  
West Kent Guardian, 24.05.1856, p. 3  
West Kent Guardian, 26.07.1856, p. 3

## Legal

This building is listed under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended for its special architectural or historic interest.

