

Number 11 – Autumn 2014



# CHATHAM HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## Medway Chronicle

*'Keeping Medway's History Alive'*



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**History Prize • Gillingham Fort • German Spies**

**CHATHAM HISTORICAL SOCIETY** meets at the Lampard Centre, Sally Port, Brompton, ME7 5BU on the second Thursday of each month except January and August.

The Centre opens at 7:15pm and the meeting starts at 7:30pm.

For news and information about Chatham Historical Society go to our website:  
[www.chathamhistoricalsoc.btck.co.uk](http://www.chathamhistoricalsoc.btck.co.uk)

Officers of the committee

President	Brian Joyce
Chairman	Barry Meade
Vice Chairman	Len Feist
Hon Sec	Sheila Erwin
Hon Treasurer	Barry Meade

**MEDWAY CHRONICLE** is published twice per year.

Editor	Christopher Dardry
Contributors	as credited throughout the magazine.

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Published by Chatham Historical Society.

The Editor welcomes articles for inclusion in future issues of the Medway Chronicle.

Please submit text and images in electronic form by email to [chatham.historicalsoc@gmail.com](mailto:chatham.historicalsoc@gmail.com) or on paper to the editor at any of the society's meetings. (The editor prefers email.)

The Medway Chronicle is produced with the financial support of MEDWAY COUNCIL.

Printed by A&T Reprographics Ltd

Frontispiece: New Road looking east with Luton Arches in the distance.

## **JACK LACEY 1920 - 2014**

The Committee is sad to report the death in June of our old friend Jack Lacey, at his daughter's home in Oxford.

Jack was a great character, as those Members who have read his contributions in the Chronicle will know.

He had for many years edited the Medway News, (The Journal of the Medway Ports Authority), and wrote numerous articles about the river, the men who worked on it and the difficulties and dangers they faced. He had been an Arethusa Boy and then became a Royal Marine. He was a River Inspector on the Medway and painted many aspects of the river, and continued to do so well into his 90s.

Jack will be greatly missed by all who knew him.

Sheila Erwin



Jack Lacey (on right - looking into camera)  
at Robert Napier School in April 2010.

## **In memory of JACK LACEY**

I first met Jack over 25 years ago when a group of about 20 people met at the Medway Arts centre with view to forming a Writing Circle. That night the 'Medway Writers Group' was born.

Jack was keen writer, poet and painter, in fact several years ago he held an exhibition of his work at the Medway Arts Centre. I have three of his paintings hanging on my dining room wall, and when I sit in that sunny room and glance up at them I always think of him with a smile.

After about 15 years the group had dwindled to about six members, including Jack, and we met at each others houses. We would criticize the writing of T.V. drama and sometimes get Jack to 'open up' about his exploits as a Royal Marine. Some of his stories were hilarious, especially about how he got his 'war wound'.

An example of Jack's humour – in spite of everyone in the group having had articles, poems or books published he always referred to us as the 'Failed Writers Group'.

Perhaps he was right after all.

Dorothy Odds.

## Robert Napier School News

### Local History Prize

The President, Chairman and I had great pleasure in attending morning assembly at the Robert Napier School on June 30th to present Chatham Historical Society's prize to CONOR MALONE for his excellent research on World War 1.



A certificate was also awarded to the best entry from each house:

Harrier	THOMAS WELLS
Osprey	RAJVEER KAUR
Kestrel	BEN PEARSON
Eagle	BURAK CARCABUK

A number of other certificates were also awarded which shows just how enthusiastic the pupils have become.



They and their teachers are to be congratulated.

Sheila Erwin

Hon. Sec.



## **The Alexandra Hospital at Wigmore. Part 2.**

by Joyce Stewart.

*In Chronicle No 9 we left the story of the hospital at the point when the case brought by Mr Chapman against Gillingham Council was settled. The jury had decided that the Council had acted incautiously when it sited the hospital at Hempstead, and Mr Chapman was awarded £250 damages.*

The Alexandra had not been completed when, on 9<sup>th</sup> January 1902, Mr Boucher, the solicitor, was requested to write again to the Port Sanitary Authority asking if they would accept the families of smallpox patients for the 18 days statutory quarantine, but on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, back came the reply that there were no ships suitable for such purposes. Presumably the relatives had to stay in their own houses for the 18 days.

Early in January an 'Iron Hospital' had been ordered from Messrs Humphreys of Knightsbridge, London, to hold 12 beds, and it took only a few days to erect, being ready to receive its first patients on the 17<sup>th</sup>. It had been decided to use the 'old pony' to convey patients in a cab from the Isolation Hospital in Canterbury Street to the Alexandra Hospital at Wigmore.

Apart from these incidents, little is heard about the Alexandra Hospital until, in 1932, there were discussions in Council Meetings as to whether the hospital should be closed and the services of three other hospitals, namely Hollingbourne Hospital at Harpswood; West Kent Hospital at Farningham and Joyce

Green Hospital at Dartford – be used.

The Hospital Accommodation Committee said that the cost of sending patients to these hospitals was far too high and that the accommodation at Wigmore was adequate to meet the needs of the Borough.

In October 1934, Hollingbourne Rural District Council informed Gillingham Borough Council that they would be willing to extend their hospital at Harpswood to accommodate smallpox cases.

Later in April 1937, the Health Committee reported that the caretaker of the Alexandra Hospital had retired and the Town Clerk asked the Committee to discuss the future care of the Hospital in view of the decision about Harpswood.

It was resolved that a temporary caretaker should be provided. However, in 1940 at a meeting of the Health Committee it was stated that the County Council had to set up a scheme so that Gillingham smallpox cases should be treated at Harpswood. This was in accordance with the Public Health Act 1936.

Between 1945 and 1960 , several suggestions were made as to the future use of the buildings, i.e. for Scout Headquarters, child clinics, youth clubs etc., but the Executors of Mr R D Batchelor, who had given the land originally, would not agree because 'the proposals were in conflict with the restrictive covenants affecting the premises'.

Eventually in 1963 the General Purposes Committee had a meeting to discuss land on the east side of Hoath Lane and it was reported that the Ministry of Health had stated that part of the land



was required in connection with a link road, part by the Admiralty for housing, and the rest to be offered for sale in due course.

The Town Clerk said that he had informed the ministry that Gillingham Borough Council would be prepared to buy, by compulsory purchase, those areas not required by the Admiralty. The Admiralty were no longer interested in purchasing the land (approximately 28 acres) so it would be sold on the open market.

It appears now that the buildings were left to decay, but the site is still there, albeit behind fences warning people off.

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1914 – 1918 Lest We Forget



Poppies made by the editor's grandchildren in the activity centre of Rochester Guildhall Museum, while members of the society were educated and entertained in the Guildhall Chamber as part of a specially arranged visit.

## Forgetter

My forgetter is getting better  
But my remember is broke  
To you that may seem funny  
But to me it is no joke

For when I'm in here I wonder  
If I really should be there  
And when I think it through  
I have not got a prayer

Oft times I walk into a room  
And think what am I here for  
I wrack my brain, but all in vain  
A zero is my score

And times I put things away  
Where it is safe  
But Gee  
The person it is safest from is me

When shopping I may see someone  
Say hello and have a chat  
Then when they walk away  
I ask myself who the heck was that

Yes my forgetter is getting better  
While my remember is getting broke

by Vic Chidgey

## Woodlands House

further notes on its history.

by Joyce Stewart.

In 1892 Louis Brennan, a local inventor, moved in to the house with his family. The prospectus for the sale of the land, which was still owned by the Lock family, describes it as *consisting of 80 acres, 68 acres of which was 'Woodlands' land, the rest being a fruit plantation. The house consisted of two tenements containing sitting rooms, wash house fitted with copper, brick oven and sink, a pantry and bedrooms. The outbuildings included hen house, pig house with two sets of piggeries, cow lodge, and wagon lodge.*

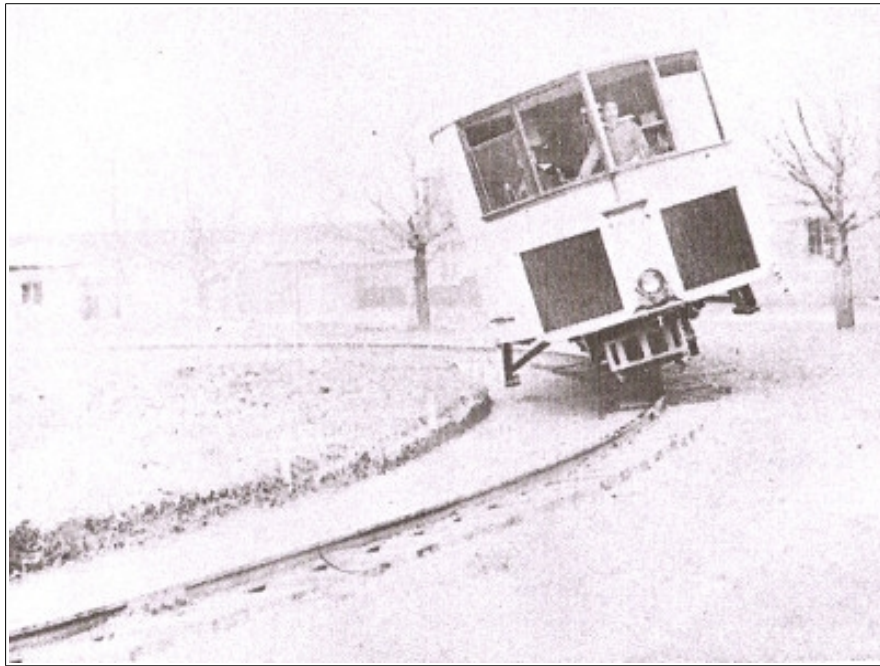
Brennan bought the Woodland part of the land (12 acres) and here he devised many of his inventions, including the Dirigible Torpedo and the Monorail System. Brennan ran a very successful torpedo factory in Gillingham, sponsored by the Government, who bought the invention in 1887 for £110,000, but perhaps he is better known for his surprisingly unsuccessful Monorail System.

Demonstrations of his Monorail System were given both at Woodlands and at his torpedo factory in Gillingham.

His first public demonstration of the Monorail was held on the 10<sup>th</sup> November 1909, distinguished visitors and pressmen from London being present. Brennan wished to delay his demonstration because of some technical difficulties, but, not wanting to be second to a German invention, he demonstrated his model on the morning of the 10<sup>th</sup>, while a German newspaper proprietor, Herr August Scheri, demonstrated his version in the afternoon.

It is said that the journalist inspected the rail first, including the

curves and when the monorail was demonstrated it “ran without any unsteadiness, carrying a full load of passengers although not attaining the maximum speed”. Later that year Brennan was awarded the Grand Prize by the authorities of the Japan/British Exhibition for his gyroscopic monorail invention. Winston Churchill was one of the visitors to the exhibition.



Despite all the publicity, the Monorail failed to attract Government funding and the inventor ran very short of money. This precipitated his move to London in 1912 when Woodlands was sold to Gillingham Borough Council for £2,500.

*When it was sold the prospectus described it as a family residence with cottage, stabling, farm and meadow land. The house, fitted with radiators, had five bedrooms.*

*On the ground floor was a lounge, drawing room with French windows, billiard room, scullery (fitted with a sink, hot and cold taps), two larders (one fitted with slate shelves), parlourmaid's pantry fitted with sink and Butler's pantry fitted with safe and cupboards.*

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## Cookham and Gillingham Forts

by Vic Chidgey

There was once a large and powerful fort within the present walls of Chatham Dockyard not far from the Bull Nose and Collier Dock. Memory of the fort still lives on in the motto and civic arms of Gillingham.

After the Dutch raid of 1667 an enquiry was held to decide what had gone wrong and to recommend how the river defence could be improved. Ordnance minutes of September 2nd 1668 ordered the building of two new forts at Chatham at Gillingham, and Cookham. The work was swiftly put in hand and the following year this was noted *-this Summer there hath been made a good progress in ye works at Sheerness and the forts at Gillingham and Cookham Wood side, both these are likewise to have towers in them which besides the keeping of stores are to be a retreat to the soldiers in case of necessity.*

Designed by Sir Bernard Gomme, ironically himself a Dutchman, the Gillingham Fort was meant to prevent warships outflanking Upnor Castle by going through St Mary's Creek, a short cut often used by our ships on their way to the Dockyard. In 1669 the fort consisted of a low earthen rampart with diamond shaped bastions at each end on which were to be mounted the bulk of the armament. A square red brick tower was provided in the centre of the fort as required by the Ordnance decision. The fort was surrounded by a wet ditch and had further protection as result of being built on a small island connected to the mainland by a wooden bridge. To the northeast of the fort an open earthen battery was built to increase the fire power. On completion the

armament consisted of 20 x 18 pdrs, 16 x 12 pdrs and 3 x 6pdrs mounted on the tower. 14 x 18 pdrs in the open battery and a further small 3 pdr gun to cover the forts entrance near the drawbridge. All the guns were mounted in the open and fired through low embrasures cut into the ramparts.

On May 5th 1671 King Charles II came down from London in the Royal sloop to inspect the Fort as well as the guard ships in the river.

The fort's garrison in peace time consisted of a master gunner and a number of invalid gunners who were men pensioned out of the Field Artillery because they were too old or unfit for duty. At the time it was normal for an invalid gunner to have upwards of 60 years service in the corps of Artillery. They rarely retired and usually were only replaced when they died or became too sick for further service. Their tasks at Gillingham fort were to maintain the ordnance carriages, ammunition and stores in good order, to report defects, to keep the batteries clean, to fire salutes when ordered, to hoist flags, also to send quarterly and annual reports on the stores to the Principal Storekeeper's office in the Tower of London.

The garrison was known for being unruly and dishonest and it prompted a local farmer, a Mr Lampard, to complain to the Crown Commissioners about their conduct.

A Board of Ordnance Inspector Thomas Bloomfield visited the fort in 1790 and made the following report on conditions - *the battery is totally in ruins except for the gunners compartment which has recently been repaired, there are 14 x 32 pdrs mounted on two low batteries which are unserviceable and should immediately be removed to Woolwich as also the powder to Upnor Castle. There are 52 barrels in store. The magazine is*



*totally dry but needs repairing. There is one Master Gunner and two quarter Gunners stationed here.*

During the Napoleonic wars in 1805 a brick tower was built alongside the open battery outside the fort. This new tower was built as an advanced work of the Chatham Lines which ended nearby at St Mary's Creek. On it were mounted two 18 pdr guns facing inland and not towards the river, the fort itself now being regarded as of little military value. Around the same period an Artillery Volunteer Corps was formed at Gillingham to man the guns in the area. This consisted mainly of Dockyard men who were used for battery practice with two light calibre guns. The Corps was disbanded in 1815 but the battery continued to be used for practice for several years.

In 1818 the fort was put up for auction but failed to reach its reserve price.

In the 1830s the Fort became a coastguard station, the old tower being used as a lookout point and accommodation for the coastguard.

The Royal Commission for the Defence of the United Kingdom 1860 reported that Gillingham Fort and the Napoleonic Tower were both obsolete and in a state of decay. To replace the role of Gillingham and Cookham Wood Forts two new casemated batteries of eleven guns each (7in and 9in rifled muzzle loading guns) were constructed at Hoo and Darnet Islands. They were completed in 1870 and were still standing in the 21st Century.

Gillingham Fort was finally demolished in 1870 when the land was required for a large Dockyard extension programme.

Most of the fort's ramparts still remain buried since the land at this point was built up by several feet to provide a wharf for Collier Dock and the railway marshalling yards.

The Fort lives on in the Gillingham Borough Arms and the names of two pubs which stand on the site of the old Gillingham Gate (now demolished) "The Bridge House" and the "Master Gunner" renamed the Prince of Guinea.

In 2013 the site of the old fort was developed. The diggers and excavators ripped out three hundred years of historic walls and footing in two days. Gillingham Fort became student apartments.

Although Gillingham Fort has gone, some parts of Cockham Wood Fort's gun platform are still visible as shown below.



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# **The Hoo Peninsula**

## **Part 1 - Cliffe**

by Len Feist

Much has been written about this village on the peninsula, which has the largest area and is surrounded by fertile land for farming, and by a larger area of salt marsh. The marshes were an ideal breeding ground for gnats which spread the Ague (malaria), resulting in many deaths.

St Helen's church is Cliffe's oldest building and reputed to have been named after Helen the mother of Constantine the Great who had been converted to Christianity in Saxon times.

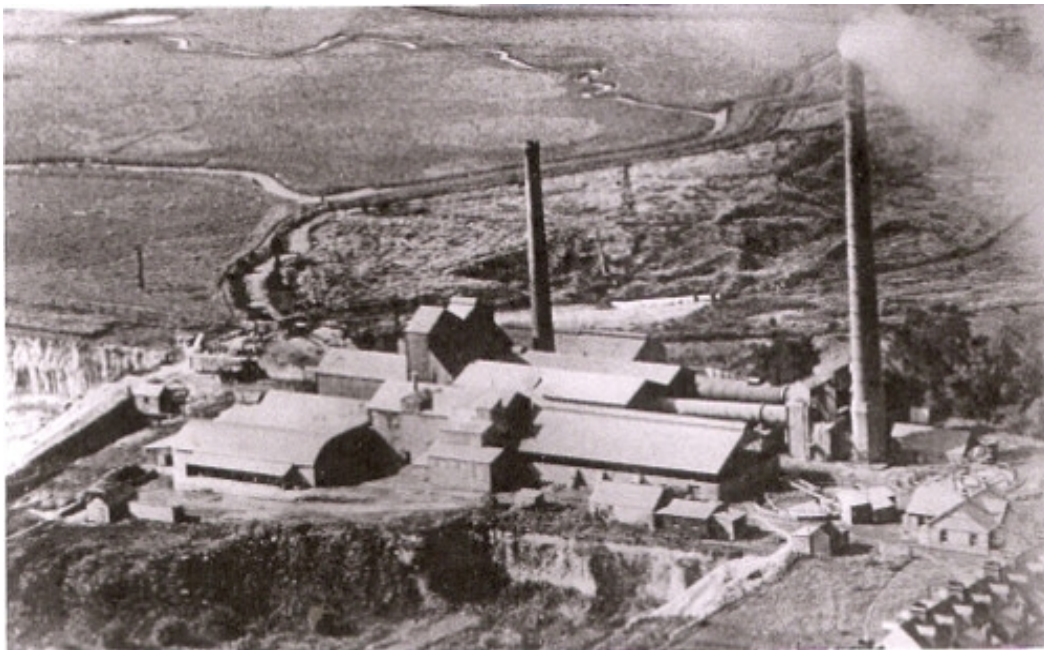


A much older church had stood on the site of the present church

which is built of Kent ragstone and flint. St Helen's is one of the largest parish churches in Kent, and some parts still have colouring on the walls, which makes one wonder what it might have looked like had it not been for Henry VIII.

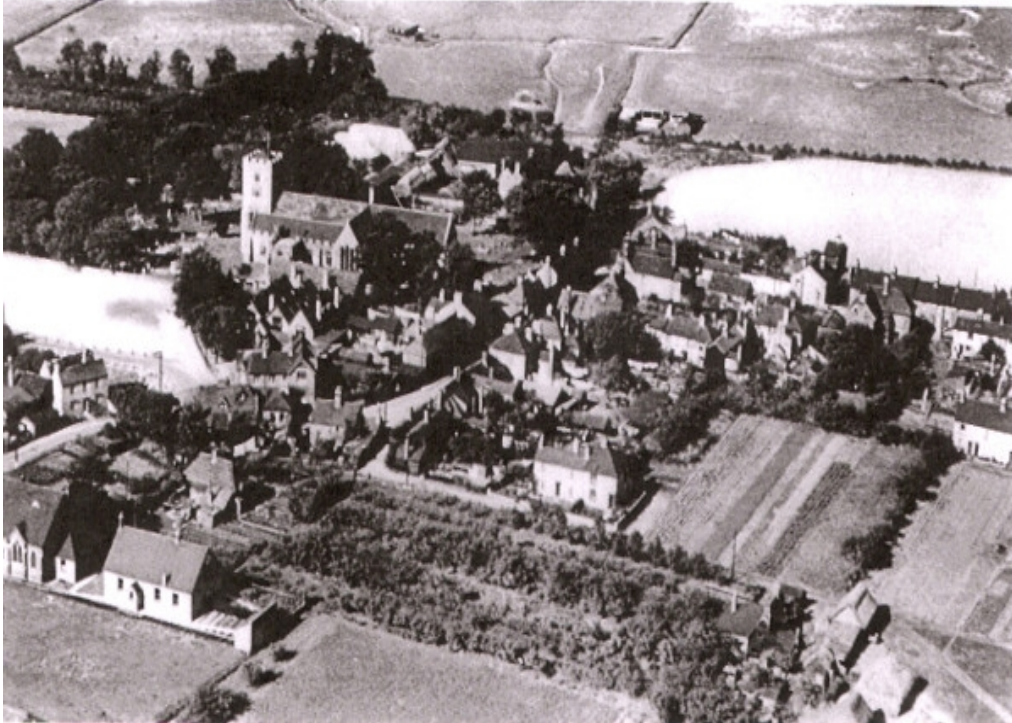
Because Cliffe was a relatively important village, many rectors of the village church became quite important people in the area more especially in the church overall.

The cement industry was a great employer in the village for many years but became played out of late. The Alpha Cement Works was the last and is pictured below.





An aerial view of Cliffe village many decades ago is shown below.



The open area to the left of the church was the location of the shooting butts where bowmen practised their art.

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## German spies in Medway in 1914

by Vic Chidgey

Great Britain declared War on Germany at 11am on the 4th August 1914. The small fledgling anti spy unit in room number 5 at the war office which had been compiling a record of all enemy aliens immediately rushed down to Rochester in Kent and arrested the landlord of a pub on Rochester High Street.



Frederick Adolphus Schroeder alias Gould, with his English common law wife Maud Sloman, was one of the most efficient German spies in the Country, with an English mother and a German father he could speak perfect English with a Medway Towns accent despite spending seven years in the German army.

He tried many small business ventures with his "wife", all of which were successful. In 1906 on a trip to Germany he was

recruited by the German intelligence service as an observer with remit to gather intelligence on the British Royal Navy based at Chatham and Sheerness. His fee would be £15 per month; a large amount for 1906.

Now came a piece of luck for Fred and Maud; they managed to become the licensees of a busy pub in Rochester named The Queen Charlotte. The move proved to be a perfect source of information for the German secret service. Schroeder now called himself Fred Gould and would give the first drink free to all dockyard workers. Then all he had to do was to listen to their shop talk.

Some workers would pass over to him secret publications regarding the up to date armaments being fitted to ships in the dockyard. These reports and papers were passed over by Maud to German Intelligence in Ostend. Unknown to the German agents they were being observed by a new British unit of the Secret Intelligence Service: a six man unit in a tiny room numbered 6 in a corridor of the War Office. Military Intelligence was painted on the door so with the existing number 6 the personnel were known as M16, a name which is still use today.

It was fortunate that the man put in charge of the new unit was a very energetic capable Naval officer Commander Vernon Kell who instigated the opening of correspondence addressed to foreigners from British subjects. The Goulds were now getting careless; a package to Herr Steinhauer was intercepted. It was known that Steinhauer was the head of the German naval bureau, and the parcel contained information about the updating of RN ships at Chatham



An MI6 agent, John Regan, masquerading as an Irish RN sailor who hated the British, befriended Schroeder and witnessed documents changing hands over the bar. On the 4th August 1914 MI5 swooped on the pub in Rochester; Frederick Schroeder was arrested but Maud was not there.

Acting on a hunch Kell sent a telegram to Charing Cross railway station in London and Maud was arrested as she was about to board the Ostend ferry train. In her possession were found a gunnery drill book, charts for Bergen and Spithead, and up to date plans for destroyers. In a search of the pub other documents were found relating to engines and engine room layouts. After the war records showed that Schroeder had supplied more naval information than all the other agents in Britain put together. Schroeder was not a man any one would take for the Kaiser's best agent; Commander Kell "thought him a fine looking fellow broad shouldered and breasted. Seven years in the German army had given him a big athletic frame and a cheery pleasant nature".

In 1914 Frederick Adolphus Schroeder alias Gould was sentenced to six years hard labour. He was not given the death penalty because his crimes were committed before the War was declared. Nothing was heard of Maud Sloman, she just disappeared from all records.

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## HMS Gannet

