

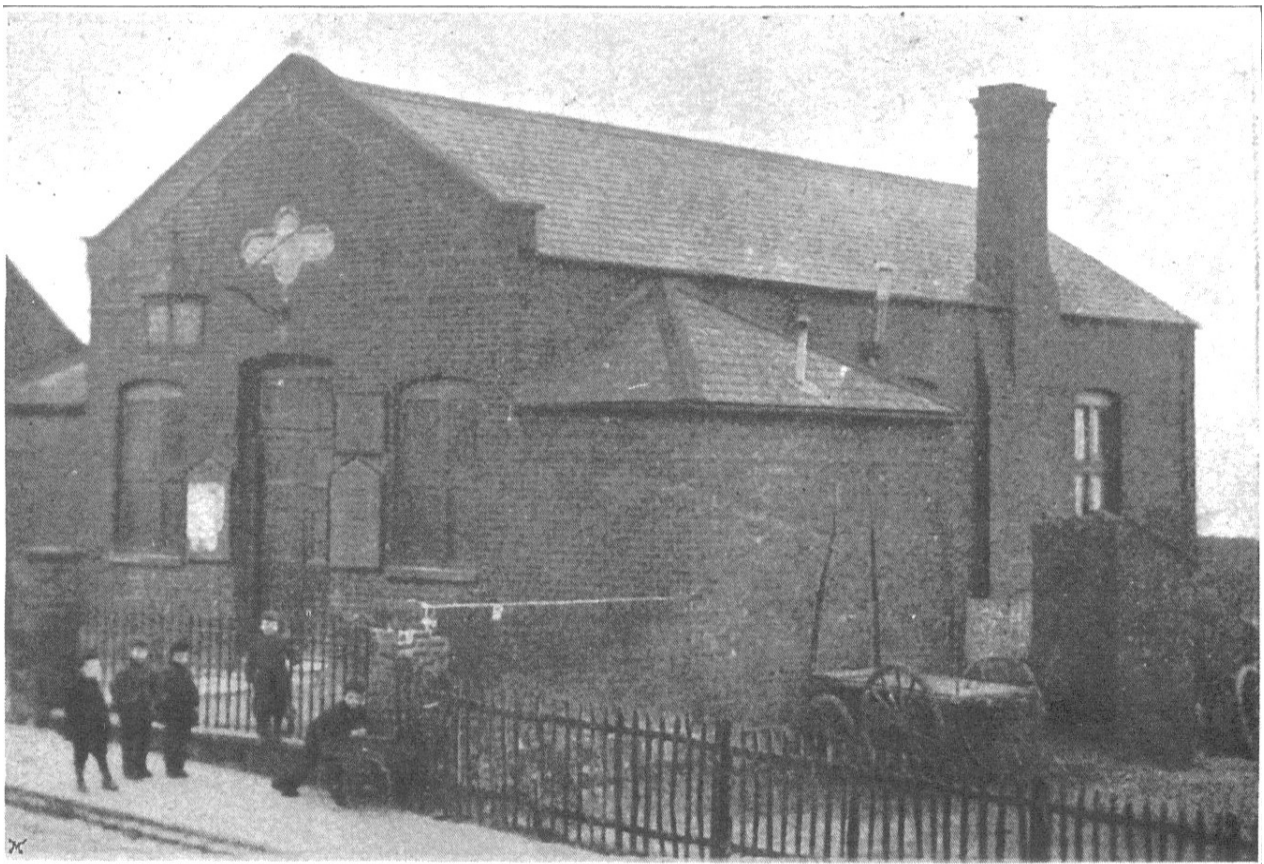
Number 13 – Summer 2016



# CHATHAM HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## Medway Chronicle

*'Keeping Medway's History Alive'*



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**Chatham Hill Chapel • Our East End • Do You Remember  
Chatham in 1765 • The Seven Lamps of Borstal**

**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.

News and information about Chatham Historical Society is available on the website:  
[www.chathamhistoricalsoc.btck.co.uk](http://www.chathamhistoricalsoc.btck.co.uk)

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

|              |                                      |
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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.

Front cover: Chatham Hill Congregational Sunday School. See “An Uphill Struggle”.

# **An Uphill Struggle**

**by Brian Joyce**

Readers familiar with Chatham Hill will be aware of the martial arts centre part way up on the south-west side. What they perhaps don't know is that the site was used for religious purposes for about two hundred years.

In the early nineteenth century, the families living on the Hill had a dubious reputation. Looking back in 1873, the *Chatham Observer* felt that: "there has always been...a moral element on Chatham Hill very difficult to subjugate; a wild, fitful, bohemian sort of spirit, often breaking out unexpectedly and requiring a large amount of tact and patience to deal with it".

Some of the more respectable residents of Chatham felt that the people of the Hill were in need of salvation. In 1812, the daughter of the Reverend Slatterie of the Ebenezer Congregational Church, together with like-minded friends, rented a room in a cottage on Chatham Hill with the aim of setting up a Sunday School to civilise the area's children. Their efforts prospered, and they were soon in need of more space.

A meeting of prominent Congregationalists in 1813 decided to build a chapel on Chatham Hill. Congregationalist businessmen donated timber and iron for the new building. Others gave money. The new chapel was dedicated in July 1813 on land that some claimed had been used by followers of the prophetess Joanna Southcott some years before.

Forty years later, the Religious Census of 1851 revealed that the Sunday School was also used for adult worship in the evenings. Thirty-two people attended on census day. Earlier that day, sixty scholars attended in the morning, and seventy-three in the afternoon session.

By 1873, this chapel had become dilapidated and uneconomic to repair. A new building was required, and it was the Young family – prominent Congregationalists who lived in a large detached house on Luton Road, that provided the wherewithal.

Joseph Young was a High Street grocer. His younger son had died in 1868, leaving £35 10s to the Chatham Hill Sunday School. Another son was an architect who drew up the plans free. One of the Sunday School teachers was Young's daughter Annie, an important local feminist.

The brick built chapel stood more or less on the site of the previous one. It cost nearly £500 to build and furnish, nearly half of which was still outstanding when the building opened in 1873. It was constructed by the builder William Ruby of Chatham. A large ground floor room that could seat 200 people was used for the Sunday School and adult worship. Underneath was a classroom for infants. The building contained an additional two classrooms.

The chapel of 1873 proved to be more than adequate for the needs of the area. It continued as a Congregationalist place of worship with the Ebenezer as its parent until the mid 1950s. By then, there was a general decline in non conformism. Additionally, many of the congregation had moved away. For those who remained, the increasing motor traffic on Chatham Hill was becoming intolerable during worship.

The decision was made to sell the site. The remaining worshippers could use the Ebenezer. The money raised would go towards building a new church, the Emanuel Free Church, at Weeds Wood. The former Congregationalist Sunday School was eventually taken over by the Jehovah's Witnesses who renamed it the Kingdom Hall.

The former Sunday School on Chatham Hill is still used for teaching purposes. Since the Jehovah's Witnesses left, it has become the Shi Kon Martial Arts Centre, teaching both adults and children the art of self defence.





## **Our East End (Part 1)**

### **by Janet M King**

To illustrate my life at the east end of Chatham in the 50s against a backdrop of the shops and other buildings that were there at the time, with a brief history of some of the more interesting ones.

We lived at the east end of Chatham, ( not to be confused with Luton !), during the 1950s. “We” were Mum, Dad, brother John, and me, Janet. We lived in a large Victorian house in Institute Road, named after the Mechanics' Institute in the High Street at the bottom of our steep hill.



*In the back yard at Institute Road*

The house was large by today's standards, having three bedrooms, a bathroom, front room, living room, large kitchen, and what we called the caboosh, which would nowadays be called a utility room. The sink and the old boiler with its mangle lived there.

The next road to ours was Cage Lane. My memories of Cage Lane, now called Upbury Way, are few. We weren't allowed to actually go there, even though we had to cross it at the bottom to get to the rest of the high street. This embargo was lifted once when I was allowed to go to a party there. We had a rabbit made of pink blancmange and I was sick in the sink! Cage Lane acquired its name because that's where the local lock-up was back in earlier times. It was heavy on the rates<sup>1</sup> as it often needed repairing ! One scare we had relating to Cage Lane was that two of the houses almost directly opposite to us were to be pulled down so that a way through could be made into the lane. This caused a lot of fear and trepidation as we didn't want to be associated with "them". We considered ourselves to be a cut above Cage Lane. How times and attitudes change.

All our day to day needs were serviced by the shops at the east end of the High Street, just at the bottom of our hill. There was a newsagent, toy shop, leather shop, bike shop, model shop, florist, record shop, pet shop, a butcher, a grocer, a chemist, two sweet shops and a corn dealers, where we bought food for the pigeons. I notice you can get fined £80 for feeding the pigeons these days, but we were positively encouraged to feed them then. It made a nice break in the day to walk to either Sun Pier or Rochester castle to find some pigeons to feed. (The original 'corn fed' birds.) Apart from the shops I remember at least two pubs for the thirsty, a library for those with a thirst for knowledge, and two cinemas, like the sweet shops, one much posher than the other.

Mrs Collins' sweet shop, well to say it wasn't very clean is being kind. The smell hit you as you opened the door, but she was very friendly and helpful. One day when I proudly announced that I had started work, at 15, she said I would now be working for the rest of my life. It was a small shop, mainly green in colour, and despite the smell I much preferred it to Pat's, which seemed intimidating although well presented.

I can remember Petts the newsagents and tobacconist from quite a young age. It was run by two sisters. The older sister was a friend of my

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<sup>1</sup> Presnail, p161

mother's. Her younger sister, Olive, was a school teacher, but sometimes helped in the shop. Our paper was delivered from there, and all manner of cards for all manner of occasions were bought from there. Occasionally I had to ask Miss Petts if she could oblige me with postage stamps for mother. Rainy day colouring books came from there, as well as comics and magazines. When I was 13 I worked there in the holidays. I loved the smell of the snuff and quite fancied to take the habit up. I don't think Mother would have approved somehow. I knew all the cigarette brands off by heart and could weigh and bag up the tobacco and snuff. Sometimes I worked in the stationery department, which was adjacent to the main shop. It was here that I found a paper pattern for a dress to make at school. The dress was made more by Mother than me. I pretended to sew at school and Mother really sewed at home until the dress was finished. It must have been really good as I was asked to model it on the school catwalk. I earned £3 for that holiday's work and bought myself an old fashioned ticking alarm clock. It was shiny red and came from British Home Stores at the other end of the high street. There was one snag. My previous clock was electric, as were all the others in the house, and the ticking of my lovely new clock kept me awake. Luckily Gran came to the rescue. She loved it and took it home with her, so peaceful nights were regained.

Rout's the grocer was near to Petts the newsagents. We only went there for ham and emergencies, as most of the stock was expensive. I can remember being sent out for the ham for our tea, and being instructed not to buy it if it was more than two shillings a quarter. Usually it was nearer 1s 10d a quarter.

Mr Ellis at number 334 was our chemist, and his medicines cured or kept at bay all our family ills. He had a pill or potion for everything. One winter, when we needed a boost, he provided us with not one but two large storage jars of cod liver oil and malt at father's request. The cupboard indoors where we kept our medicines was like a "mini Ellis's". We had Carter's little liver pills, Dewitt's kidney and bladder pills, Scott's emulsion, Andrews liver salts, TCP, Elastoplast, Minadex, Aspros,



Aspirins, Anadins , Beacham's powders, Haliborange and iron pills (for mother's problems). This incomplete list may seem excessive but father was a bit of a hypochondriac. Mr Ellis's shop had the old fashioned mahogany counter and glass fittings, holding all sorts of female treats, as well as the more mundane daily necessities for the family . I used to love the flower scented hairspray by Goya.

Cooper's at number 340 was where the latest records could be bought. It sold all kinds music from classic to pop. It wasn't a very large shop and not as modern as Boots with its listening booths. I couldn't afford many records when I was growing up and really had to save hard for an EP. My LPs came from Woolworth's and were not by the original artists. I can remember my first buy from Cooper's. It was Lets Dance by Chris Montez. Being my favourite (and only) record at the time it was played over and over and over again.

Le Core's cornered Cage Lane and the High Street. It was a model shop and we got our Airfix model kits from there. Later its name was changed to Man & Boy. What about the girls I hear you cry, but women's lib was to come at a later date. My brother John was quite keen on making steam engines and we had a large complicated replica to make. I seem to remember him getting frustrated that the wheels didn't turn. I tried to help, *even though I was a girl*, and did in fact succeed in getting them to go round.

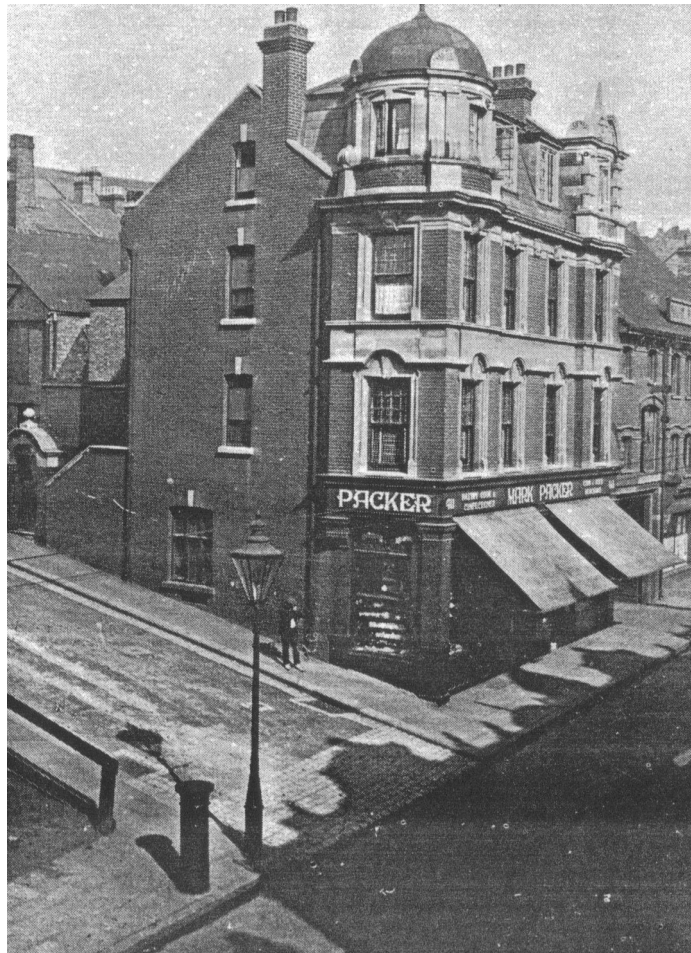
Dad, being a navy man, built battleships. We had quite an array of them adorning the glass cabinet in the front room. For my part I completed a thatched cottage. I didn't paint the parts first of course, as recommended in the instructions. As usual I was in too much of a hurry, impatient to see it finished. This was a big mistake and the finished item looked rather messy.

I remember Greta Hills, the florist's, as being the first shop past the arched walkway by the Ritz. We didn't go in there much, but I did get my

wedding flowers from there in 1970. It was a small shop as I recall but the flowers always looked lovely. I chose a large posy for my bouquet, not wanting traditional flowers. It was the 70s after all and it was important to be different. Mother's Day flowers came from the church. My brother and I both received small posies which were given, one each, to the Grans. Mother received a larger arrangement from the vicar for her cleaning services, and this was counted as her Mother's Day thank you. Flowers also came from Down Gran's (Dad's mum), who grew and showed lovely chrysanthemums in her garden. She once won a prize for her flowers at the town hall. She always picked her flowers a bit near to their peak, and one day Dad came in carrying a lovely bunch of stalks, where the heads had fallen off in the car !

At the bottom of our hill, on the right, was Mackay's the printer. At least there was a sign to it. The only thing I really remember was a trellis type fence with a lovely display of bindweed. I assume the printers were hidden behind there somewhere.

The building we knew as the Packer building stood on the left at the bottom of the hill. It was built for Mark Packer using the same distinctive red brick as the library. As time went on he acquired two of the neighbouring shops , the business becoming quite large. I believe he had more premises at the other end of the high street as well. The shop at the bottom of the hill was where we used to buy corn to feed the pigeons at Sun Pier and Rochester Castle. For some reason we didn't go there for our bread. Whether he was dearer or not I don't know. It may have just been that we got all we needed from the Bettabake man who used to deliver. I remember asking at the back door of the van for our main regular order, 'a large medium cut, please'. Sometimes, for a treat, we would get a large farmhouse or a milk loaf instead. I loved the farmhouse loaves, and I've searched in vain ever since for one that tasted that good.



*The Packer building.*

Francis Iles cornered the Brook and was a haven for collectors of china during the time I remember. I could only afford the tiny Walt Disney hat box series, which would be worth something now if only I'd kept them. I can remember buying Dumbo and Bambi, but I'm sure I had some others.

Pat Mannington's, the dreaded hairdresser, was a little building that laid back from the other shops, near Francis Iles. I wanted my hair long, but mother wanted it short. Off I would go for a trim, just to stop the split ends. I explained that I was growing it, but to no avail. Ask for a trim mother would say, so I dutifully obliged. A trim seemed to mean something in hairdresser speak, and I ended up with my growing hair cut short. I'm sure that mother went in before me and had an arrangement with the hairdresser.

I eventually refused to go to Pat Mannington's, or any other hairdresser, until my hair was half way down my back and I could put it up, Audrey Hepburn style, as I fancied I looked a bit like her.

Happy days !



*The author with her Audrey Hepburn hairstyle*

**Do you remember?**

**by Vic Chidgey**

Trams in Gillingham High Street

Luverly Jubberly

Bouffants

Hoola Hoops

Ration Books

The Long Bar

Rochester Football Club

Jezreel's Tower

Powdered milk and egg

50 Shilling Tailor

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**Chatham in 1765**  
**by H. A. James**  
**(Vice Chairman of Chatham Historical Society in 1965)**

As the VICTORY was floated into the waters of the Medway on that May day in 1765, the men who had built her gave three rousing cheers and went home well satisfied, little knowing that they had just completed what was destined to become the most famous fighting ship in history. As they left the Dockyard through the Main Gate, looking much the same as it does to-day, what was the Chatham to which they walked like?

**Old Brompton**

After coming through the Main Gate many of the men would have turned left towards Old Brompton, passing the lime kilns for which William Pitman paid a poor rate of 9d. (4p in 2016) in 1767. This village had grown as the Dockyard had expanded during the past hundred years. Hasted writing in his great “History of Kent” in 1797, describes Brompton as a “village of four hundred houses”. Hasted was closely connected with Chatham. His grandfather was Joseph Hasted, ‘Chief Painter to the Royal Navy at Chatham’ in the early years of the 18<sup>th</sup>. Century, and his grandmother was Katherine Yardley, a member of an important Chatham family. The village was well supplied with inns and on the hillside were the houses of the artisans, many of which remained until well into the 20<sup>th</sup>. Century. On the higher ground, in streets like PROSPECT Row and Mansion Row, were the better houses of Dockyard officials and Royal Navy and Army Officers. Mr. Thomas Hammond the Master Blacksmith of the Dockyard lived at No. 15 Prospect Row in the 1750’s.



## Chatham

The Chatham men would walk along the ‘Dock’ road, with the hillside rising away to their left, on which were being built or had just been built, the Infantry Barracks. On their right would be the buildings of the Dockyard, the Old Storehouse and the two Roperies. At the end of these buildings, a lane ran down to the river to “New Stairs” from where a boat could be taken to Upnor, Rochester Bridge and the “Chest Arms “ jetty; or further afield to Halling or Sheerness. The Chest Arms , or Sun Tavern jetty, was the landing place for Chatham at this time and occupied a site roughly mid-way between the present Sun Pier and the Empire car park (roughly where the Tax Office is)

## Hill House

After the New Stairs Lane came the garden and meadow of Hill House. This famous building stood on what is now the southern part of the Marine Barracks parade ground. (now Medway Council Offices). It had been built in the 16<sup>th</sup>. Century and in the succeeding years had served as the ‘Admiralty House’ of the time. Samuel Pepys had spent the night there in April 1661 and records this in his famous Diary As the Dockyard had expanded northwards, Hill House became the Pay Office and by 1765 it had become so dilapidated that it was given up by the Navy. It was now used as an Inn and was eventually demolished about 1805.

Beyond Hill House, and between it and the Church, another lane led down towards the river; possibly to the entrance to what was in the 16<sup>th</sup>. and early 17<sup>th</sup>. Centuries, the Dockyard and what had now become the Ordnance or Gun Wharf. This was Red Cat Lane which contained several houses including the Rectory and two inns, the ‘Queen’s Head’ and the ‘Red Cat’. The ‘Queen’s Head’ stood at the corner of Dock Road and Red Cat Lane. All this was demolished to make way for the Marine Barracks in the 1790’s.

## Chatham Church

The next and last building on the right was the church, on the site of the present building. This church had been built about four hundred years previously during the time 1310 to 1350. Little is known of it; it was often included in plans of the Dockyard area and these show it to be a large building cruciform in plan. A print of 1715 and another of 1728 show it to have a square tower topped with a prominent square turret and lantern. It was demolished in 1788 and at this time sufficient interest was shown in it to record at least part of it. An engraving published in 1790 shows the chancel (being demolished) and view of a particularly fine triple sedilia – the stone seats on the south side of the chancel for the officiating clergy.

The Rector of Chatham at this time was the Rev. Walter Frank. There is a record in the parish books of the church's part in the life of Chatham in this year of 1765. As well as the names of those who were baptised, married and buried, it is known from the record of the 'briefs', the appeals from other parishes for help, how the people of Chatham responded to these calls for aid.

The year of 1765 was a particularly bad one for hailstorms. On March 19<sup>th</sup>. the Chatham people contributed £3. 5s. 4d. to help relieve the distress caused by a hailstorm in Sussex; on April 29<sup>th</sup>. £1 16s. 3d. for a hailstorm in Kent; on July 21<sup>st</sup>. 13s. 6d. for another in Berks. ; on August 28<sup>th</sup> 7s. 3 and 1/2d. for another in Hampshire and finally on October 20<sup>th</sup>. 11s. 8 1/2d for another in Yorkshire. It would appear that as the year wore on and as the hailstorms became more frequent Chatham's generosity waned. In addition to this help they also gave a total of £2. 14s. 3d. to help nine other parish churches that were rebuilding or being repaired.

## Fortifications

At this point the VICTORY builders would have to pass through the line of the recently built fortifications to get to their homes in Chatham. These fortifications consisted of a bank and moat with many projecting bastions. Much of them can still be seen or traced today, running from the river just below Chatham Church along three sides of an approximate rectangle and back to the river at a point level with the Pembroke Gate. These 'Lines' had been first proposed in the early years of the century . In July 1708 an Act was passed to appoint Commissioners to agree and purchase any land required for 'the better fortifying of Chatham'. In the following year another Act authorised surveys to be made and these Acts resulted in the purchase of land to the value of £16,700.

Owing to the changing international situation, little else was done until the Seven Years War when the threat of invasion loomed large. In fact it is conceivable that had it not been for Hawke's and Boscawen's victories at Quiberon Bay and Lagos in 1759, the 'Year of Victories' this invasion might well have taken place. Plans of the fortifications were prepared in 1756 and work started in that year under the supervision of a Captain John Desmoretz, who from the sound of his name, was possibly a continental expert on fortifications.

## **The Seven Lamps of Borstal**

This story appears in Donald Maxwell's book 'Unknown Kent'  
(Published in 1921.)

When the author was travelling across the continent he visited Damascus and the street 'called Straight'. There he saw the workshop of an old man who had made lamps 'to hang before the altar of God'. The author was moved with great admiration and said 'I will buy these lamps and they shall hang in the Church of Saint Matthew which is in Borstal'. The brass worker was glad to hear this and said he would 'fashion more of the cunning work which is in these lamps, and they shall be ready in thirty one days.'

The Author returned to his own land and before the thirty one days had passed there was a great war, and the lamps did not arrive. The author thought that now the Turks had become our enemies the lamps will never come to Borstal. The Turks took the workshop of the lampmaker and took all the brass and made the lampmaker and his men work like slaves making instruments of war. But, ere the Turk had come, the old man had taken the lamps and buried them in the ground, 'Lest the ungodly find them and the Church of St. Matthew at Borstal be desolate'.

Now the painter served in the King's ships and the war raged, and he forgot the lamps that were in Damascus. After five years, when the War had ended it chanced that he was sent to Damascus and he remembered the lamps but thought that the lampmaker could be dead or his goods scattered, or perhaps he had survived. He went to the street called Straight and the old man remembered him and was overjoyed. He took him into the deep cellar where he had secretly buried the lamps. The painter sought to pay him for preserving the lamps but the lampmaker would take nothing saying "are they not thy lamps, and for the Church of

St Matthew". And so the lamps came to Borstal.

In Borstal when the feast of St. Paul came there was great rejoicing, and the Bishop came to dedicate the lamps. The author had two friends who did not survive the war and so the lamps were dedicated to the memory of **Victor Morgan** and **Luke Taylor** who fell in the Great War.

Sheila Erwin.



*The Seven Lamps of Borstal*

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