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PART 4

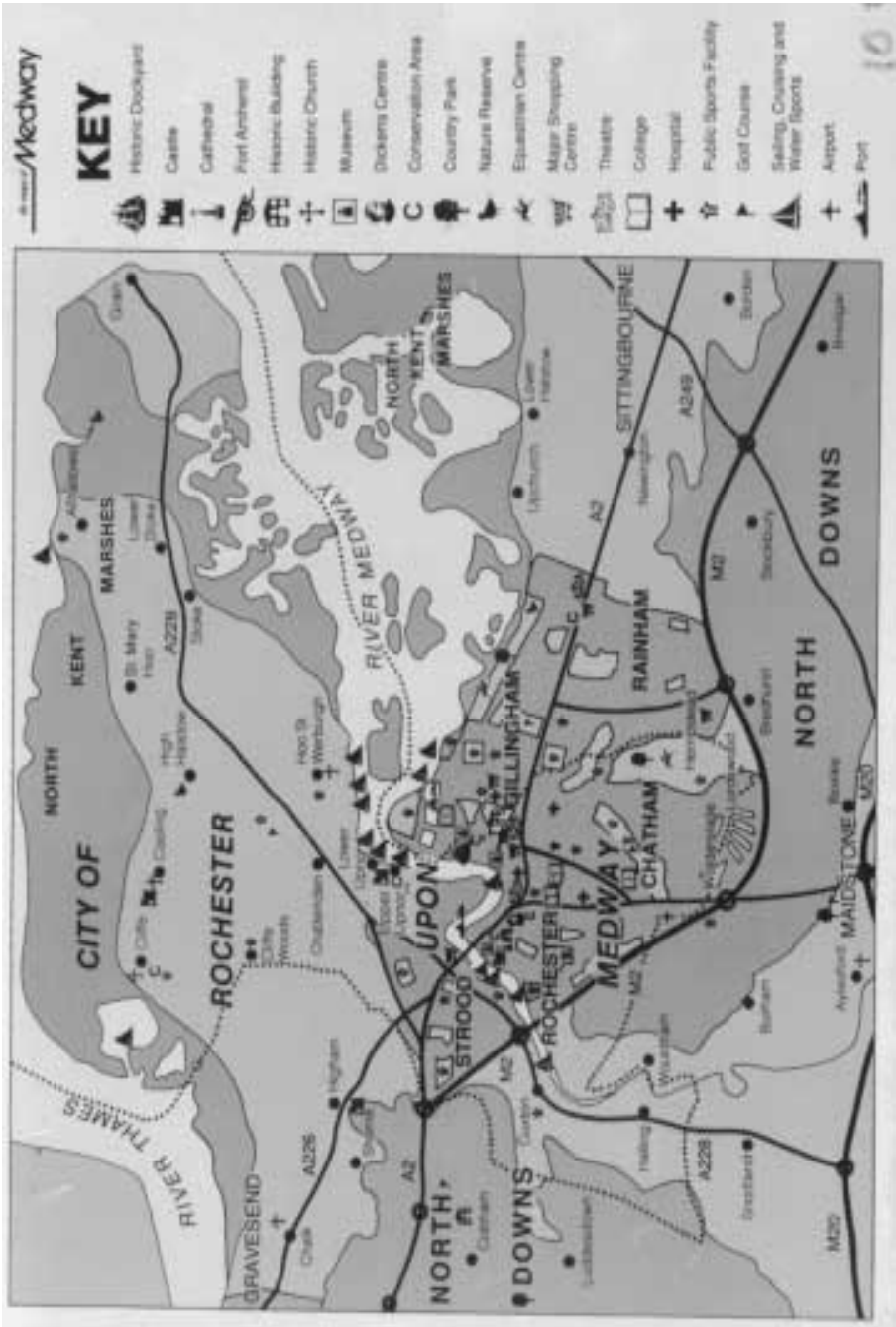


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Local Information

Introducing Medway

Medway Borough in North Kent takes its name from the River Medway which runs through it, uniting the historic city of Rochester, the former Borough of Chatham and eleven parishes of the former Strood rural district. It is bounded on the north by the estuary of the River Thames and its centre is thirty miles from London on the A2, the main road to Dover and the Continent.

Medway's 138,000 people make it the most populous borough in Kent. Within its sixty-two square miles are busy urban centres and wide stretches of peaceful countryside. The tidal river carries great ships and an ever-increasing number of leisure craft. History can be seen in Medway's three castles, at Rochester, Upnor and Cooling. Rochester's Norman cathedral symbolises a long ecclesiastical history, going back to AD 604. Chatham Dockyard, where Nelson's flagship *Victory* was built, shows visitors the base upon which was founded Medway's long association with the Royal Navy and the Royal Marines. In addition, the Royal School of Military Engineering has been established in the Medway area since the early 19th century.

Medway is a busy centre of industry and commerce. Chatham's shopping centre has long attracted visitors from a wide area of Kent, and the new Pentagon complex makes it a major shopping area for the South-East.

Around Chatham

The centre of Chatham has been steadily redeveloped over recent years, old Victorian properties being replaced by new offices and flats, the disused RN Gun Wharf being laid out as attractive Riverside Gardens. Such buildings at Riverside as were adaptable have been economically used for municipal offices and new buildings have been added, notably the spacious Central Library, now part of the Kent county library service. Dominating all, even the tower of the 1899 Town Hall, is the Pentagon complex, covering some 4½ acres adjoining the High Street. The complex includes a multi-storey car park, a multi-level air-conditioned shopping precinct and bus station, a ten pin bowling centre and high-rise office block. Chatham is already a large shopping centre and the added facilities of the Pentagon attract shoppers from even further afield. On the southern side of Chatham great new housing estates, council and private, extend into the wooded countryside of Wayfield, Weedswood, Walderslade, Lordswood and Dargets Wood, providing well-spaced, attractive modern homes, in settings preserving as far as possible the rural atmosphere.



Chatham.



In Chatham High Street, near the old boundary with Rochester, is Sir John Hawkins' Hospital, founded by the great Elizabethan seaman in 1592 as almshouses for aged, impoverished and disabled mariners and shipwrights. The original building was replaced in 1790 by the red brick almshouses seen today. Also worth seeing is the fine row of 14 houses called Gibraltar Terrace, built along the New Road in 1794.

Around Rochester

Rochester is an ancient city and a modern industrial town. Its housing estates cover the hills on both sides of the Medway and its factories cluster along both banks, and on the high ground of Rochester Airport to the south. The massive mediaeval walls of Rochester, which can still be seen from the High Street, enclosed a miniature city of 23½ acres, its size dictated by the Roman walls of the 3rd century. Within that space stand the Cathedral, Castle, Guildhall, Corn Exchange, the "Six Poor Travellers" charity founded by Richard Watts in 1579, and many houses of historic interest. Outside the East Gate of the city were built three fine black-and-white gabled houses and the red brick Tudor mansion called Eastgate House, now a museum, and nearby, Restoration House where Charles II slept on his long journey to London to be crowned. The West Gate of the city was at the bridge, which led to the suburb of Strood and on to London by the Roman Watling Street. The present twin steel bridges are successors to bridges of stone and timber, going back through mediaeval and Saxon times to the Romans. On the Strood bank of the river, standing among the modern factories, can be seen a beautifully restored flint manor house which belonged to the Knights Templars in the 13th century. On the same side of the river a plaque at Strood's new shopping precinct records the site where once stood Bishop Glanville's monastic Hospital of the New Work of St Mary at Newark Yard, built in the 12th century. The river is still an artery of commerce as can be seen by the freighters moored below the bridges; but now more than ever it is valued as a source of pleasure and recreation, as the many small craft moored above the bridges testify.

Gillingham – An Introduction

Gillingham is situated on the northern edge of the North Downs some thirty-five miles south-east of London and forms the eastern part of the Medway Towns conurbation. It has an area of seventeen square miles and sits astride Watling Street, the London to Dover Road. The main rail route to the north Kent coast and the M2 motorway both pass through the borough giving speedy access to both London and the Channel Ports. The population numbers some 93,000 at present. The oldest part of Gillingham is Brompton in the west of the borough and here are located the important naval and military establishments that have been a vital part of Gillingham for several centuries. Gillingham has gradually developed from the west with several large self-contained housing estates under construction with their own schools, shops and churches.

Rainham, once a small village, is now a sizeable and growing residential

area with its own shopping centre and a recently rebuilt railway station which handles a great deal of commuter traffic daily. The northern boundary of Gillingham is the River Medway. Both Gillingham and Rainham have commercial docks, and at Gillingham the borough council have developed a recreation area known as the Strand with a beach, open air swimming pool and many other facilities. The southern part of the borough has grown very rapidly in recent years with the development of Wigmore and Rainham. Development at Hempstead has recently started and eventually there will be new schools, a district shopping centre and public open spaces within the 200 acres for development. Despite all these changes there are still many acres of agricultural land, large areas of woodland not yet touched by development and several picturesque valleys that are as beautiful as any in Kent.

Gravesend – An Introduction

Gravesend river front, with its Promenade, waterside gardens and Canal Basin, is a constant source of interest and pleasure to both residents and visitors. Gravesend has looked to the river over the centuries, and still does, for the livelihood of many of its people. The town has developed into a sizeable residential area with its population having doubled during the last 50 years. The newer housing has come to the south and west of the town and its comprehensive shopping centre has expanded away from Gravesend's birthplace beside the river at the bottom of its High Street.

A number of disastrous fires particularly in the 18th century robbed the town's riverside of many of its ancient buildings. Of those remaining, Milton Chantry at the western end of The Promenade and founded about 1320 is the oldest. Its timbered roof is of particular interest and renovation work has been carried out by the Department of the Environment. Gravesham Council has landscaped the Chantry into its Fort Gardens. A progressive redevelopment of parts of Gravesend's town centre is being carried out including some local authority new housing. To the south of New Road there is a major shopping redevelopment with parking the Anglesea Centre. A number of new office blocks have been built and permission approved for some others. A new Civic Centre complex incorporating a civic theatre was opened in 1968 and a new Divisional Police Headquarters has recently been completed. Gravesend is conveniently situated for people working in London and wishing to visit the riverside. There is a frequent and fast train service to Charing Cross with a journey time of only 45 minutes. Gravesend is not a London dormitory town.

Its combination of riverside importance with a pleasant place to live in easy reach of London, the Kent coast and the Kent countryside has made it a well-balanced community with traditions and personality of its own.

Northfleet

Like Gravesend, and for much the same reasons, Northfleet is a thriving residential and industrial area with strong maritime connections. Most of the industry of Gravesham is concentrated on the riverside of Northfleet on the

site of former chalk quarries. Chalk cutting has been a local industry since the earliest times and the town became famous when William Aspdin, the inventor of Portland Cement, set up his kilns in 1846 and began to export to all parts of the world. Other industries followed to the Northfleet riverside and so came the houses for its workers.

With the coming of steamers and railways the first big influx of visitors and commuters came to expand that housing.

The Northfleet area extends away from the riverside and across the A2 trunk road to Istead Rise and part of New Barn. Here there has been quite large, but carefully controlled, housing expansion in the past 15 years. Various areas in the central part of Northfleet have been redeveloped, and further work, particularly in the Perry Street and High Street area, is going on. It is interesting to note that, although Northfleet was inhabited in Roman times and there was an early Saxon settlement, the population at the beginning of the 19th century was less than 2,000. A hundred years ago it was still less than 7,000 but now has risen to over 25,000. The parish church of St Botolph existed in Saxon times. A tower was added in Norman times. The church, with its unique rood screen, is one of the largest parish churches in Kent and was built in the 14th century. It retains part of the older fabric.

Some Places of Interest

Temple Manor

Henry II gave this estate to the Knights Templars and they held it until their suppression in 1312. There is a 13th century stone hall with a vaulted undercroft, and 17th century extensions at each end. Daily opening admission charge. Off Knight Road, south west of Strood High Street, Strood. Tel: Medway 718743.

The Friars

This restored pre-reformation monastery, which is now a Carmelite priory, has a shrine with a number of chapels containing modern religious art and ceramics. Admission free, although a small donation for the upkeep would be appreciated. Off the Aylesford-Eccles Road, Aylesford, Maidstone. Tel: Maidstone 717272.

Allington Castle

Stephen of Penchester built this fortified Manor House in 1283. It was the home of the Wyatt family in the Tudor period, but from 1554 the castle decayed until it was purchased by Lord Cornway in 1905. In 1951 the Carmelite Friars from Aylesford bought the castle from the Conway family and it is now used as a residential centre for conferences and retreats. There are guided tours, for which a charge is made, between 1400-1600 hrs daily. Off the A20, near Maidstone. Tel: Maidstone 754080.

Leeds Castle

This apparently medieval castle was rebuilt in the 19th century when it was adapted and restored as a country house. The interior was again restored in

the 1920s, and during this time the present collections of tapestries, furniture and works of art were assembled. Tel: Maidstone 765400 for opening times and current admission charge.

Boughton Monchelsea Place

A battlemented Elizabethan manor of Kentish ragstone, built in 1567, still inhabited and set in its own landscaped park where fallow deer have roamed for over 300 years. Displays of Dresses, Haberdashery, Carriages, Old Vehicles and Farm Implements. Open Easter to early October on Sat, Sun and Bank Holidays, and Wed in July and August, 1415-1800 hrs. 4½ miles south of Maidstone, by the Hastings road to Linton then to Boughton.

Rochester Cathedral

In AD 604 when Justus became the first Bishop of Rochester, King Ethelbert built the church of St Andrew. This Saxon cathedral was destroyed and, during the course of the centuries, rebuilt several times. The present building dates from 1080 with 12th and 14th century additions. The oldest parts of the cathedral are Gundulph's Tower and part of the crypt. Daily opening but for further information Tel: Medway 843666.

Rochester Castle

This is the second largest castle in Kent and one of the finest examples of a Norman military building in the country. Its great square keep dates from the time of Henry I. The view from the battlements is well worth the climb up the spiral staircase in the width of the keep's massive walls. Admission charge. Daily opening. Contact Tourist Information Office for further details. Tel: Medway 843666.

Charles Dickens Centre

The Dickens Centre has an audiovisual exhibition of the life and times of Charles Dickens placed in the Medway setting he so often used in his writing. Eastgate House, High Street, Rochester. Tel: Medway 844176.

