

THE USS RICHARD MONTGOMERY

So do the proponents of a Thames Estuary airport not know what 7,000 tons of explosive can do??? Frank Turner, who previously spoke to us about the Maunsell forts just off the coast, returned to tell us the story of the SS Richard Montgomery which now lies on Sheerness Middle Sand.

In 1939, during WW2 when German U-boats were inflicting great damage on our shipping in the North Atlantic, Britain sent a delegation to the USA to request that they built some ships for us. As their involvement was slight at this stage we paid for these ourselves. The firm of J Thompson of Sunderland organized for 60 ships based on the model of a Liberty ship to be built in Florida. They would be manned by 81 crew and 36 gunners. 270 days was the time taken to build the first one – by the end it was down to 50 days. Today's equivalent cost was 25 million pounds and it was to be paid in GOLD.

Loaded with their 7,000 tons of mixed explosives, including bullets, bombs and phosphorus, a fleet was assembled in the Thames' estuary ready to sail for Cherbourg. The ships were registered by HMS Leigh at the end of Southend Pier and instructed where to anchor. The second in charge was horrified and advised that you couldn't anchor in that spot – he was completely ignored and what happened? The US Montgomery got stranded on a sand bar at low tide and broke her back. The captain was blamed for this and the originator of the order was never disciplined.

In 1944 the order went out to relieve the ship of its dangerous cargo. Of course, being such a perilous task, the stevedores wanted extra expenses! Thus it would have cost the equivalent of 2 million pounds to remove and therefore when only half of the explosives had left the ship the Admiralty felt that they could pay no more. For some strange reason offers by the USA to complete the work in 1948 and 1957 were both refused. So there she sits, visible by her two masts with some explosives already primed. To compound the situation more munitions recovered after the war were also dumped there – just unbelievable. The last survey by the Marine and Coastguard Agency was in 2010 and did not show great changes from its last report in 2009. Today the wreck is the responsibility of the Ministry of Transport; and who knows what might happen next.

EUNICE DOSWELL

For detailed information about the village don't forget to visit the Society's very own website at www.mardensociety.org.uk

ADVANCE NOTICE

WEDNESDAY 24 April - Paul Hal

"The White Cliffs and Samphire Hoe"

The Parish Pump is distributed free to Members of The Marden Society every two months



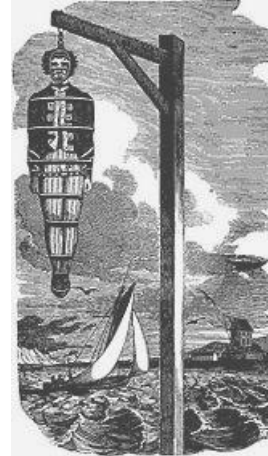
For details of Membership please contact the Membership Secretary Aileen Hill on 01622 831418

The Parish Pump

The Journal of the Marden Society

March 2013

PENENDEN HEATH



The villages north of Maidstone, nestling at the foot of the Downs, might have been popular for rich Victorians as a place to build their grand houses, but one of these has a more ghoulish past. Penenden Heath is at the centre of Kent and was a meeting place for 800 years and had a Shire Moot for such a purpose before County Hall was built in Maidstone. Robin Ambrose, a very knowledgeable amateur historian for this area, accompanied his talk with fascinating old photos. Some of you already knew that Penenden Heath was the site for hanging miscreants. The gallows was situated just SW of the Chiltern Hundreds pub. To be specific a gibbet could accommodate one whilst the gallows could hold three or more and the scaffold was the platform to hold the hanging contraptions.

We were introduced to some of the characters involved in these grisly deaths. In 1655 the son of the Earl of Faversham took a hatchet to a rival when fighting over a girl. He arrived in a coach accompanied by his friends, plus his coffin. Even then he had to listen to a half-hour sermon from a vicar before taking 10 struggling minutes to die. Susanna Lot poisoned her husband in 1769. This was counted as Petty Treason. For this crime men were hanged but women were burned at the stake. She was dragged all the way from Maidstone tied to a hurdle. Witches were also burned. In 1820 a teenager was made to walk his last journey from Maidstone to the gallows carrying his own coffin.

Hangmen were appointed to the post and in 1488 would receive 14s 6d per year. Hanging was intended as an example to others but in the days with no television for entertainment, such occasions drew crowds of spectators. With 2,000 congregating at a time there were also the vendors of food and sellers of leaflets about the crimes.



Treason warranted the worst possible death (miss the next few lines if you have a delicate constitution) with your bowels pulled out and burnt before your eyes, your head removed and your body quartered.

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In Victorian times, with more of the Heath being cultivated, the hangings moved nearer to the Bull pub and 1830 saw the last hanging there. The following one was outside Maidstone prison and hangings continued there for 30 years until these punishments were moved inside the gaol. Finally the last hanging, of John Dyke, was in 1930. As this picture shows, he was subsequently shown to be innocent. However when digging out sand from the Heath to build the prison, 300 skeletons were discovered. Otherwise many of the bodies had been taken away and used for practice by surgeons.



We seem to have been rather a rebellious county with Wat Tyler, Jack Cade and Thomas Wyatt the Younger all leading rebellions. Penenden Heath was an ideal gathering place for rebels and militia alike.

Our evening finished on a more pleasant note with a pictorial tour of notable mansions in this area, unfortunately many now demolished. The Earl of Romney presented this land to the people of Maidstone in the 19th century for use as a recreation ground. But what more exotic treat for the Maidstone inhabitants than to see the elephants from Tyrhwitt-Drake's zoo.

Pictures on page 1. show

Captain Kidd hanging on the gibbet and in an iron cage.

2. The Triple Tree gallows at Tyburn (note the crowds in the background!)

EUNICE DOSWELL

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Our AGM in January was unfortunately held on a bitterly cold evening, and despite the promises of cheese and wine, the turnout was less than usual. However the necessary business was soon concluded and we all enjoyed a glass or two of wine and a good selection of cheeses, thanks to Aileen. 2013 is now in full swing so do come along on March 27th, Wednesday to hear Rod le Gear talk about Underground Kent, including the Chislehurst Caves.

On April 24th Paul Holt of the White Cliffs Countryside Partnership will talk about Samphire Hoe. This amazing site is built from the material dug when building the Channel Tunnel and turned into a site for walks, wild life and views of the White Cliffs. Everyone is welcome and membership is only £5 per person annually for 7 talks and the Parish Pump delivered to your door. Hope to see you there.

MAUREEN CLAYTON

FUN QUOTES!

Be careful about reading health books. You may die of a misprint. *Mark Twain*
Santa Claus has the right idea. Visit people only once a year. *Victor Borge*

MARDEN SOCIETY POSITION ON PROPOSED M.A.P DEVELOPMENT

Redrow Homes have now formally applied for planning permission to build 112 new homes (100 houses and 12 flats) on the land and buildings comprising the MAP site in Goudhurst Road.

The Marden Society does not believe it is appropriate to have such large-scale developments in Marden. However we recognise that pressure for new housing imposed by central and local government means they are almost inevitable. The Maidstone Borough Council "Core Strategy", though now abandoned for the time being, called for 320 new homes in Marden by 2026, so it will be difficult to resist substantial development.

The MAP development as proposed by Redrow at their open day in November appeared to be well thought out. It contained a mix of housing styles including tile hung and weather boarded houses, which are in keeping with the local vernacular style. There was also provision for ponds, open spaces and wildlife friendly areas, and provision of a limited number of allotments. However there is little provision of garden space for any of the homes, and we feel this should be addressed by reducing the housing density and providing more space around each home.

Also the site is adjacent to, and partially on, the flood plain so provision of adequate drainage and flood defences is essential if the development goes ahead. (It is understood that Redrow have made adequate allowance for the position on a flood plain.) Finally as is well known that the sewer system in this area is marginal and needs to be upgraded if more homes are going to be built. However in general the Marden Society does not intend to object to this proposal but would welcome any comments from members.

The Parish Council held open days on Friday 1st and Saturday 2nd March in the Vestry Hall, where the full plans were displayed for the public to study, together with other proposed developments. Those attending were invited to Have Their Say on the future of Marden. Comment forms were available for them to complete with their views. There was an impressive turn-out. (About 300).

MAUREEN CLAYTON—Chairman

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NEXT MEETING

WEDNESDAY 27 MARCH

Rod le Gear

"Underground Kent"

This interesting Speaker is paying us a third visit

In the 1500s, Bread was divided according to status. Workers got the burnt bottom of the loaf, the family got the middle, and guests got the top, or the upper crust.