

There are no reserve pilots, if one man is unable to fly the team can demonstrate with 8 men but if the team leader is unable to fly the display will be cancelled. There is a tenth pilot and an aircraft which can be used as a reserve machine and a tenth man who acts as team supervisor and co-ordinator in all practises and displays, he is also the ground safety officer and provides the display commentary.

The special equipment worn include an oxygen mask and a microphone, life jacket and 'speed jeans' which are connected to the aircraft. The pilots wear red suits for displays and green suits for training. In the winter training is carried out in Cyprus and they train three times daily, five days a week. Their support aircraft are Hercules and the support team of engineers are known as the 'Circus'. The displays show the best of British engineering and craftsmanship and the team also support over 500 charities, including Great Ormond Street Hospital. *Barbara Dubois*

MEDWAY CRUISE TO ALLINGTON CASTLE



In June members of the Marden Society took a boat trip on the Kentish Lady to Allington Castle, the well-hidden Medieval Castle on the banks of the River Medway just above Allington Lock (where the Medway becomes tidal). We boarded the Kentish Lady just below the Archbishop's Palace. It was a perfect summer day and the group was met at the mooring and escorted through lovely gardens for a walk round the Castle by our guides,

Jackie and Colin. Antique tapestries and furniture adorn the Great Hall – we were not given access to other parts of the Castle but the magnificent hall was well worth seeing.

Allington Castle was originally built in 1174 as a moated defensive building, but all that remains of the original castle is part of a wall and the kitchen fireplace. Henry VIII visited with Ann Boleyn as guests of Sir Thomas Wyatt in 1530. The Wyatt family converted it to a manor house in 1451 but the Castle was abandoned in the 16th century after a disastrous fire. The property was seized by the Crown in 1554 following Sir Thomas Wyatt the Younger's unsuccessful rebellion to topple Queen Mary – he was subsequently beheaded! J M W Turner sketched and painted the decaying castle in 1798.

Sir William Conway acquired the site for £4,800 freehold in 1905 and started restoration. Luckily most of the work was completed before the First World War, but the whole project took almost 30 years. From 1951 to 1999 it was the home of the Order of Carmelites under the jurisdiction of Allington Priory. Now the Castle owned by Sir Robert Worcester is a wedding and events venue and also used as a filming location. Boat moorings are hired out on long-term non-residential leases. We finished the tour of the Castle with a walk through the grounds to admire the topiary, the roses and the family of swans with the four cygnets. On the return river trip we enjoyed a welcome drink and cakes supplied by the 'Kentish Lady'. Many thanks to Carol for organising this trip – thoroughly enjoyed by all. *Mo Clayton*



Firstly, apologies for the long delay since our last Parish Pump in April, the editor had too many other things going on! There was no meeting in July or August, so in a change to our programme as our original speaker cannot make it, our next meeting, will be on **25th September when Chris Woodward** will tell us about the "**History of Canals**". Chris is an experienced dinghy and power boat sailor, and senior instructor. He takes youth groups on holidays on the canals for training and just for the fun of it. The meeting will be in the **Vestry Hall at 7.30 p.m.**, with refreshments and raffle as usual. The revised October and November meetings will be announced in due course.

THE DARKER SIDE OF DICKENS

As Geoff Doell remarked at the beginning of his March talk, the great Victorian writer lived his life by double standards. His public persona, revered by his fellow authors and adoring readers, suggested a virtuous character of high moral standing. He was renowned for his condemnation of the horrific social conditions in Victorian times. The plight of abandoned children, bad education, living conditions and social injustices were all pilloried in his works, e.g. *Oliver Twist*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *Bleak House*, *Hard Times*. His plots were often based on his own life experiences, as were many of his characters. His early life was not easy, taken out of education at the age of fourteen and set to work in a boot blacking warehouse to earn money to support his family. His father had been thrown into jail for non-payment of debts incurred by gambling and hard drinking. Although his father was subsequently released, his mother felt he should continue working. Dickens never forgave her which probably coloured his attitude towards women. Eventually he returned to education for two years but despised the school and its masters and later lampooned it in *David Copperfield*. At 16 he joined a law firm as a junior clerk, then became a reporter and gradually, as his articles and sketches became more widely published, began to make his way up both the literary and social ladders.

His first literary success was the publication of the *Pickwick Papers* in 1836, the same year he married Catherine Hogarth, daughter of George Hogarth, his editor at the *Evening Chronicle*. The first of his ten children was born in 1837 and Mary, Catherine's younger sister moved in to help with the household. Dickens became very attached to her and never really recovered from her sudden death. Georgina, Catherine's second sister then moved in and rumours started about Dickens' relationship with her. Eventually his parents-in-law accused him of incest, which Dickens strongly denied to the extent that he obliged Georgina to undergo a virginity test. After this Dickens refused to be in the



same house as his in-laws. In spite of this Georgina stayed loyal to Dickens until his death, continuing to look after the children and eventually took his side during the separation of Charles and Catherine. Dickens started to travel to America and the Continent and in 1851 formed a friendship with the author Wilkie Collins. He had always been attracted to amateur dramatics and in 1857 co-wrote a play with Collins to be performed by professional actors, including Ellen (Nelly) Ternan. Dickens fell passionately in love with her and despite the 27 year age difference remained devoted to her for the rest of his life.

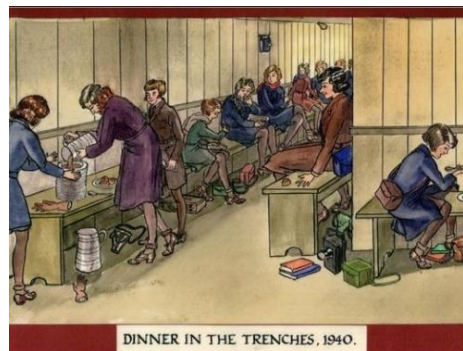
There were already problems in his marriage and Catherine, after the birth of ten children had become very stout. Dickens decided they should separate and she left the family home, taking one child with her, but denied access to the other children. A son, Walter, was sent to India at the age of 17 but hated life there and begged to return. Dickens ignored his requests and Walter died in India six months later. Because of the strict Victorian attitude towards marriage and infidelity, Dickens tried to keep his affair with Ellen secret, but eventually rumours emerged and publishers and authors condemned his behaviour. He was involved in the Staplehurst train crash in 1865 and behaved heroically at the scene, but as he was travelling from Paris with Ellen and her mother, he managed to avoid giving evidence, thus avoiding a scandal.

He installed Ellen in a house in Slough and it is believed she gave birth to a son there who later died in childhood. Five years to the day after the Staplehurst crash, Dickens died. It is believed he died with Ellen at her house, but she arranged to have his body quietly removed back to the family home avoid scandal. In his will he left Ellen £1,000 and made sure she was financially independent. After suggesting that she was ten years younger than her actual age, Ellen eventually married a schoolmaster who became the Headmaster of a school in Margate. She gave birth to two children and subsequently died in 1914 at the age of 75. *Barbara Dubois*

A SCHOOLGIRLS' WAR

Thanks to the 'Beast from the East' in 2018, Mary Smith's talk, 'A Schoolgirl's War', was delayed for a year but proved well worth the wait. In 2013 one of the former air raid shelters, or tunnels, at Maidstone Grammar School for Girls, was opened up and renovated. At the same time, among the school archives, was found a book entitled 'Maidstone Grammar School War Diary', or 'Scrapbook'. This book contained a series of beautifully executed watercolours, the work of the then art teacher Helen Keen, showing life at the school under the difficult World War II conditions. Upon her retirement Mary was invited to write a book centred upon the paintings. With the help of the vivid memories of several 'Old Girls', now in their 80s and 90s, a fascinating account of teaching at that difficult time was brought to life. The school, only completed in 1938, was greatly overcrowded due to the influx of 240 evacuees from Plumstead. Air raids were frequent, especially during the period of the Battle of Britain, but the air raid shelters, or tunnels, were only completed in 1940. Prior to that girls remained at home to be called in at infrequent intervals to sort out their lessons.

The tunnels themselves were of zig-zag shape, each length built to accommodate 30 pupils. They were narrow with no ventilation, earth floors, with water dripping down the walls and no heating. The girls sat on narrow benches fixed on either side of the tunnel giving very little space to pass between them. Teachers were unable to see the pupils properly, they needed to shout, and even so the girls would be unable to hear them. Due to the comparatively short duration of the raids the girls could be in and out of the tunnel several times in one day, It



would appear that the walls were used as blackboards as all sorts of subjects including maths, English and science were found to have been written upon them. The feared Headmistress at the time was Miss Bartels, (a former suffragette), whose formidable presence kept the girls in order. Dinner was served in the shelter when necessary, cooked in the school kitchen and hastily brought down to the shelters by the kitchen staff who were also taking refuge there along with the girls. In view of the severity of the air-raids over Maidstone, the evacuees were eventually relocated to Bedford, but the Maidstone girls continued at the school. The girls themselves were also encouraged to carry out voluntary war work which included hop stripping and fire watching in the evening and, from June 1944, doodlebug watching.

Miraculously, despite its location close to railway lines, the school remained intact and the drawings in the diary record the end, just as it showed the work at the beginning of the War. The school, still only 7 years old, could return to normal and two of the tunnels were demolished. The surviving renovated tunnel is now used as an educational tool and children from local primary schools, whose curriculum includes WWII, are welcomed to the school and to visit the tunnel. They are given a lunch based on WWII rations and experience a morning of war-time education in the tunnel. *Barbara Dubois*

THE RED ARROWS

Guy Bartlett's talk about the Red Arrows, or, officially The Royal Air Force Aerobatic Team, began with the history of previous Air Force display teams with the help of various video clips showed many of these teams in action. In 1938 it was the Gloucester Gladiators, joined together with a piece of rope! After World War II there was a big RAF recruitment drive for pilots, navigators and crew and displays were shown at local bases to encourage recruitment. Some were very good and in 1947 the Black Knights from RAF Odiham were formed, flying de Havilland Vampires. Then in 1956 the Black Arrows were the premier display team, their loop and barrel roll with 22 Hunter aircraft has never been equalled since. The Black Diamonds with Hawker Hunters followed in 1960 to be succeeded by the Red Pelicans in 1962.

The Red Arrows were formed in 1964, initially based at Fairford, then at Kemble and finally at RAF Scampton where they remain to this day. Initially there were seven display pilots flying Folland Gnat Trainers. In their first year they flew at 65 shows across Europe. In 1969 the then Team Leader Ray Hanna expanded the number to nine and the famous Diamond Nine pattern was introduced and remains the team's trademark, with copyright for this formation. In 1979 they changed to the BAE Hawk trainer which they fly to this day. The Red Arrows have now performed over 4,800 displays in 57 countries worldwide.

The team has nine display pilots, all volunteers. To qualify, a minimum of 1500 flying hours is required, the pilot must have seen action in the front line of duty and possess above average flying skills. The team leader will serve 3 years of duty. The team are split into two, sections 1-5 are known as Enid and sections 6-9 as Gypo.