

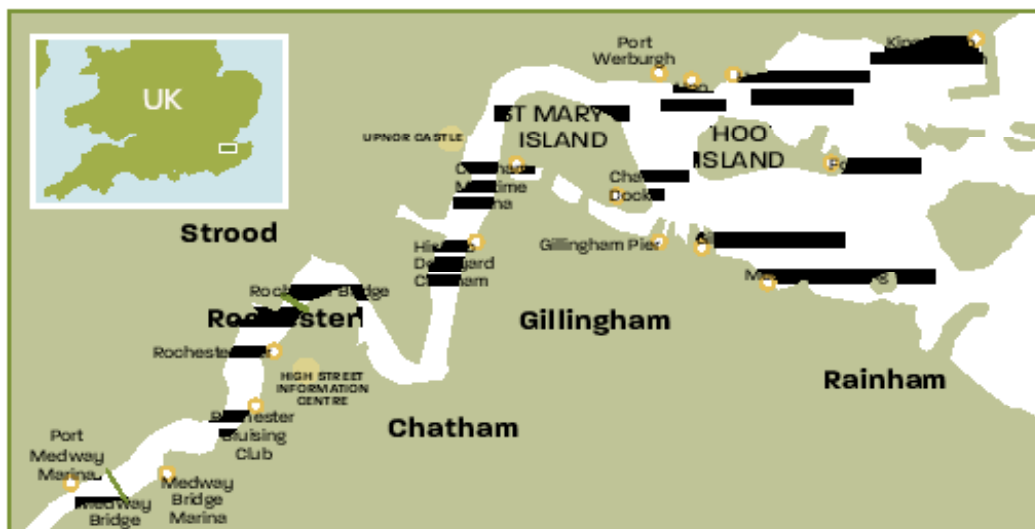


Picture perfect:
A stunning sunset on the River Medway

The River Medway

This short jaunt through the heart of leafy Kent, provides plenty to delight fans of Britain's maritime heritage, plus challenging waterways and some of the best marina facilities this country has to offer

REPORT BY RICHARD JOHNSTONE-BRYDEN



The River Medway cuts through the heart of 'The Garden of England', yet until the demise of the military bases at Sheerness and Chatham it was known as the Navy's river. Today, the gap left by the closure of these establishments is increasingly filled with leisure and commercial activities. With its close proximity to London and Europe, the River Medway is a strategically placed cruising ground offering the boating enthusiast 22 nautical miles of tidal waters from Sheerness to Allington Lock (near Maidstone) followed by a further 19 miles of non-tidal waters to the market town of Tonbridge.

Situated at the heart of this historic waterway are the towns of Gillingham and Chatham, together with the city of Rochester. Between them they boast an array of tourist attractions, modern marina facilities and local amenities.

Lower Medway

The **Medway buoy** in the Thames Estuary marks the beginning of the approach channel to the River Medway and the edge of Medway Ports' area of jurisdiction. From this point onwards boaters should monitor VHF Ch74 to keep track of the movements of the large commercial ships using the various docks along the river.

The wreck of the WWII ship *SS Richard Montgomery* lies to the north of the main approach channel approximately two miles north east of **Sheerness**. She sank in August 1944 and is believed to have approximately 1500 tonnes of explosives still onboard. An exclusion zone around her is clearly marked by a ring of yellow buoys and should not be entered under any circumstances.

The river entrance is overlooked to the west by the 244m high chimney of Grain power station and **Garrison Point** to the east. A powerful light mounted on top of the Medway Ports office at Garrison Point warns of large ships underway. Shining upstream it warns of inbound ships. Shining downstream indicates the movement of outbound vessels.

The completion of the country's only Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) terminal on the **Isle of Grain** resulted in the introduction of new guidelines for



The southern bank of Gillingham Reach is home to the Medway Cruising Club

those using the lower stretches of the Medway in June 2005.

An exclusion zone applies to the area around the LNG terminal. Whenever a LNG tanker is berthed at the terminal, vessels are not permitted within a 250m arc of the cargo transfer arms (approximate position listed as 51°25.9405'N 00°42.5448' E). This zone drops to an arc of 150m when there are no LNG vessels moored at the terminal. A speed limit of seven and a half knots applies to all craft passing the exclusion zone. If necessary, vessels below 50m long can pass within the exclusion zone providing they keep at least 100m away from moored LNG tankers and observe the seven and a half knot speed limit.

Whenever LNG tankers are underway between the Medway Buoy and the LNG terminal, no craft can cross the channel less than one mile ahead or half a mile astern of the tanker. Vessels

below 50m can proceed in either the same or opposite direction as a LNG tanker providing they can safely do so, outside the main navigation channel.

Having cleared the exclusion zone around the LNG terminal it is merely a case of following the buoyed channel through the open marshland, past the **Kingsnorth Power Station** and on to the Medway towns. Even though high water covers many of the mud flats and saltings lining the main channel along

this stretch of the river, those without detailed local knowledge are advised not to stray far beyond its limits.

“ Until 1746 the river was impassable above Maidstone ”

The Medway towns

Pass the fort on Hoo Island's Folly Point and a six-knot speed limit comes into force, before rounding out on to the Gillingham Reach. The southern bank of this reach is home to the Medway Cruising Club, SEGAS Sailing Club and **Gillingham Marina**. The entrance to Gillingham Marina's locked basin can be seen between the large gas holder and the marina's modern leisure centre. Helmsmen attempting to enter the marina's lock, which can be accessed up to four and a half hours either side of high water, need to be aware that tidal streams vary on the Medway from about one and a half knots at neaps through to three knots at springs. Those wishing to use the marina's nearby tidal basin can do so for up to two hours either side of high water.

The Medway waterfront, along the southern bank beyond Gillingham Marina, is set for major changes in the years ahead. This is all thanks to a sustained regeneration programme triggered by the closure of Chatham Dockyard in 1984.

Gillingham was the birthplace of Will Adams, the first Briton to sail to Japan

New housing developments line Wickham Reach





Upnor Castle is fronted by a water bastion jutting out into the River Medway

Hoo Marina

Berths: 120

Visitor Berths: Dependent on number of vacant berths

Facilities: Water and electricity, toilets, showers, boat and engineering repairs,

20 tonne crane, cafe

Prices: £12 per night including electricity and VAT

VHF: Ch 80 or 37 "Hoo Marina"

Phone: 01634 250311



The departure of the Royal Navy left a 400 acre site that has been split into three areas. The eastern corner, containing one of the three locked basins, was handed over to Medway Ports and transformed into a successful commercial dock handling more than 500 vessels a year. The other two basins, together with their surrounding land, were allocated to the South East England Development Agency for commercial, leisure and residential uses. Completion of waterside houses along

the edge of St Mary's Island, and the opening of **Chatham Maritime Marina** within the former No1 Basin, are early signs of the progress being made. The marina can be accessed via a lock at all states of the tide although the depth over the sill drops to 1.5m at MLWS.

Hoo Marina

The north shore opposite St Mary's Island is home to five of the river's clubs including the **Hundred of Hoo Sailing Club**, so-called because in Roman

times, Hoo was required to support 100 Roman centurions. The club was formed in 1948 as a cruising organisation for the owners of both sailing and motor craft. Facilities include a club house, slipway, moorings in Hoo Creek and dry storage.

The most unusual collection of boats along this stretch of river are moored at **Port Werburgh**, located next to Hoo Marina, and home to 112 intriguing vessels including a former gunboat, light craft, barges, tugs and passenger boats.

Rounding the top of St Mary's Island you enter **Upnor Reach** and soon pass Upnor Castle. The gun fort here was commissioned in 1559 by Queen Elizabeth I to protect the fleet when it was at anchor in the reaches of the Medway and Chatham Dockyard. Sadly, the castle proved ineffective when Admiral de Ruyter led a Dutch raid up the Medway on 12 June 1667. It was subsequently used as a barracks prior to its opening as a museum after WWII.

Chatham Dockyard

Further along this reach the covered slips and preserved warships of **The**

Factfile

How to get there

Train stations at Rochester, Chatham and Gillingham connect via London Victoria as well as the regional Kent rail services. There are regular bus services between Rochester, Chatham and Gillingham as well as services from Chatham railway station to Maidstone and Gravesend.

Slipways

Gillingham Pier's wide concrete slipway is suitable for all sizes of trailboats two hours either side of high water. Launching fees vary according to size of craft. Port Medway Marina's slipway can cater for all sizes of trailboats up to one and a half hours either side of high water.

Books and charts

- Admiralty Leisure Folio 'SC5606 Thames Estuary Ramsgate to Tower Bridge'
- Imray '2100.3 The Kent Coast River Medway'
- 'East Coast Rivers Cruising Companion', Janet Harber, Nautical Data, £19.95
- East Coast Pilot 'Lowestoft to Ramsgate' by Colin Jarman, Garth Cooper & Dick Holness, Imray, £19.95
- 'Reeds OKI Eastern Almanac', Adlard Coles Nautical, £22.99
- 'East Anglian Skipper's Guide', Sahira Publications, free of charge

Gillingham Marina



Berths: 500

Visitor berths: Dependent on the number of vacant berths

Facilities: Water and electricity on pontoons, showers, toilets, laundry, pump out, 64 ton and 20 ton boat hoists, chandlery, provisions including an off licence, petrol, diesel and bottled gas sales, bar and restaurant, on site leisure centre, full boatbuilding facilities including two heated spray booths, helicopter landing pad

Prices: Tidal basin £1.40 per metre per day including electricity and VAT. Locked basin £2 per metre per day including electricity and VAT

VHF: Ch 80 "Gillingham Marina Lock"

Phone: 01634 280022

START

1

Medway buoy

5.6 miles

2

Garrison Point

8.2 miles

MEDWAY
CRUISING
CLUB

GILLINGHAM
MARINA

3

Gillingham Pier

Historic Dockyard Chatham come into view. In contrast to the other two parts of the former Naval base, which were developed in the second half of the 19th century, much of this 80-acre site dates from between 1704 to 1855, forming the world's best-preserved dockyard from the age of sail.

The site will open daily in 2007 from 10 February to 28 October and weekends only in November, before closing for a two month shutdown. Visitors are advised to allow at least five hours to appreciate all of the attractions, although full-priced individual tickets are valid for a year from the date of issue, so if you run out of time you can always come back again.

Highlights include a collection of RNLI lifeboats and major exhibits recreating the Royal Dockyard of 1758 and describing the 400-year history of the Naval base. On view is the Victorian sloop *HMS Gannet* (1878), WWII destroyer *HMS Cavalier* (berthed in dry dock on the site where construction of Nelson's flagship *HMS Victory* began in 1759) and the submarine *HMS Ocelot*, the last of the 400 warships to be built by the dockyard for the Royal Navy.

Rochester

At the end of Chatham Reach, the river winds past Chatham Ness and the top of Rochester. Progress beyond the fixed Rochester Bridge is restricted to those craft with an air draft of less than 5.9m.

For those wishing to visit the historic heart of **Rochester** during daylight hours, the pier located upstream of Rochester Bridge provides an ideal stopping point. It has 12 free moorings –

Small craft, such as canoes, can get as far as Penshurst



The great keep of Rochester Castle towers over the River Medway

but remember to purchase a £1 token before going ashore to be able get back through the security gate to your boat.

The pier is just a short walk from the imposing **Rochester Castle**. This medieval fortress was commissioned in 1087 by Bishop Gundulf, who made use of the surviving Roman city walls. Its towering 34.5m high central keep was commissioned by Archbishop de Corbeil in the 12th century and is the tallest Norman keep to survive in

England. The castle's chequered history includes a siege in 1215, when King John brought the south east tower crashing to the ground, after setting fire to it using the fat of 40 pigs. The rebuilt keep provides the perfect backdrop to a series of concerts within the grounds during the summer months.

The other landmark to dominate the Rochester waterfront is the equally historic **Rochester Cathedral**, which is the second oldest in England, founded by Bishop Justus in 604. Both buildings are a few moments

Don't miss...

Free guided walks

The City of Rochester Society organises a series of 90-minute public guided tours between Good Friday and the end of September. They depart the city's visitor information centre at 1415 on a Saturday, Sunday, Wednesday and public holidays. Tours are free although donations to the society are gratefully received. Alternatively, pick up a leaflet from the city's visitor information centre to follow the Dickens trail around Rochester to see the local places that were featured within his books such as Restoration House, Eastgate House and the Guildhall.

The Royal Engineers Museum

Discover The Duke of Wellington's map of Waterloo at the Royal Engineers Museum in Gillingham, where you can also see Victorian guided torpedoes, tanks and a Harrier jump jet among the 6000 items displayed across 25 galleries.

Underground tunnels

Explore the tunnel complex of Chatham's Napoleonic era Fort Amherst.

Boat trips

Leave your boat behind and take a cruise back in time onboard the preserved paddle steamer *Kingswear Castle*. This historic vessel was built by Philip & Son of Dartmouth in 1924 and operated regularly along the picturesque River Dart until 1965. The coal-fired paddle steamer was subsequently restored by the Paddle Steamer Preservation Society. During the summer months she undertakes a programme of day, afternoon and evening excursions departing from either Rochester Pier or the Historic Dockyard Chatham.



Chatham Maritime Marina



Berths: 310
Visitor berths: 12
Facilities: Water and electricity on pontoons, toilets, showers, laundry, 20 ton crane, petrol and diesel sales, waste disposal, WiFi hotspot,
Prices: £2.60 including VAT and electricity
VHF: Ch80 "Chatham Maritime Marina"
Phone: 01634 899200

1.1 miles

4

Chatham Docks

2.9 miles

UPNOR
CASTLE

CHATHAM
MARITIME
MARINA

5

Rochester Bridge

ROCHESTER
CASTLE

1.5 miles

ROCHESTER CATHEDRAL



London seems a world away in leafy Kent

walk from the town's Victorian High Street with its restaurants and shops.

The 100 pontoon berths located downriver of Rochester Pier belong to the **Rochester Cruising Club (RCC)**, formed in 1905. Since 1960 RCC has organised the annual Admiral's Cruise when the Mayor of Medway, who also holds the ancient title of Admiral of the River Medway, inspects the waters under his/her jurisdiction. The Admiral's Barge together with the other official boats are supplied by members of the club. Joining their craft at Hawkwood Stone, the Admiral's party, which is usually accompanied by up to 200 boats from the river's other clubs, makes its way to Garrison Point. On the way, the fleet pause beside the wreck of the

battleship *HMS Bulwark*, to pay their respects to the 738 members of her ship's company who were lost when she exploded off Burntwick Island, while embarking ammunition on 26 November 1914. The cruise usually concludes with the Sunset ceremony back at the clubhouse, followed by a champagne reception and buffet.

Medway Bridge Marina lies approximately one and a half miles upstream of Rochester Bridge, where the view is dominated by the three bridges that make up the Medway Viaduct, more commonly known as the Medway Bridge. Two of the bridges carry the M2 motorway, while the third will form part of Channel Tunnel high speed rail link.

Upper Medway

The eight-mile long stretch of river between the Medway Bridge and **Allington Lock** is restricted to motor boats with low air draught, due to the constraints imposed by the various fixed bridges. Aylesford pedestrian footbridge is the lowest of these structures, with an air draft of 2.87m at mean high water spring. These upper stretches shoal appreciably with an average depth of 0.9m to 1.2m at low water.

From Hawkwood Stone to Allington Lock, yachtsmen are advised not to sail too close to the banks, due to a number of piles and other obstructions. The 19 miles of non-tidal waters beyond Allington Lock come under the jurisdiction of the Environment Agency.

Daily, weekly and monthly short-term licenses can be obtained either from Allington Lock's Navigation Officer or the Environment Agency's Kent Area Office. From 1 March to 31 October Allington Lock is operated for two hours either side of high water, when those times fall between 0700 and sunset. The rest of the year the lock is manned for the same tidal window, providing it occurs between 0800 and 1600. With a minimum of 24 hours' notice, transits outside these hours can be arranged.

Craft drawing less than 1.2m can reach **Tonbridge**, although heavy flooding causes shoals to develop in the river, especially downstream of the 10 locks. It's not always possible to clear the shoals before the start of the boating season, so visitors should proceed with caution when there has been any localised flooding. Equally, it's worth consulting the Navigation Officers at Allington Lock for the latest information.

Useful numbers

Medway Ports
harbour master captain
Steve Gobbit
01795 596596 VHF Ch74
Environment Agency
Kent Area Office:
01732 223222

Allington Lock
Duty Navigation Officer:
01622 752864

Hoo Ness Yacht Club
01634 250052
Hundred of Hoo Sailing Club

01634 250102
Medway Yacht Club
01634 718399

Medway Cruising Club
01634 852654
Medway Motor Yacht Club
01622 737647

Rochester Cruising Club
01634 841350

Wilsonian Sailing Club
01634 250318

Upnor Sailing Club
07092 197923

SEGAS Sailing Club
01634 855365

Port Werburgh
01634 252107

Rochester Visitor Information Centre
01634 843666

The Historic Dockyard Chatham
01634 823800
www.chdt.org.uk

Paddle Steamer 'Kingswear Castle'
01634 827648
www.pskc.freemove.co.uk

Upnor Castle
01634 718742
www.medway.gov.uk/tourism

Royal Engineers Museum
01634 822839
www.remuseum.org.uk

Fort Amherst
01634 847747
www.fortamherst.com

Port Medway Marina

Berths: 250 pontoons (due to rise to 350 by 2007)

Visitor berths: Dependant on the number of vacant berths

Facilities: Water and electricity on pontoons, toilets, showers, laundry, two 40m x 7m dry docks, 22 ton mobile

crane, 20 ton boat hoist, 16 ton boat hoist, bar and restaurant, boat and engineering services, chandler's (to open March 2007), slipway

Prices: £10 per night including VAT
VHF: Ch37 "Port Medway Marina"
Phone: 01634 720033

Medway Bridge Marina

Berths: 100 pontoon berths and 75 residential berths

Visitor berths: Dependent on number of vacant berths

Facilities: Water and electricity on pontoons, toilets, showers, 16 ton boat hoist, chandlery, petrol, diesel and gas sales, cafe, B&B, engineering services, boat repairs

Prices: £1.30 per metre per night including VAT and electricity
VHF: Ch80 "Medway Bridge Marina"

Phone: 01634 843576



6 Medway Bridge Marina

8 miles

MEDWAY VIADUCT

7

Allington Lock

19 miles

8

Tonbridge

total
46.2
miles