

Bun, Cuppa and Chat

Veterans' Group



NEWSLETTER

May 2026



It's been a funny old Spring. With snowdrops and daffodils blooming early, we moved on to muck spreading, an annual event in Starston which means enduring The Smell inside and outside the house for a few days as all the farm muck is ferried up to a field in front of our house. It's then sprayed over various fields in the village, meaning I must take avoiding action when walking the dogs, or we get sprayed too. I cleaned out the pond and, after weeks of rain and failed efforts, finally got the bonfire going with the help of Sam the gardener and some white spirit. Then we had a long dry spell and some chilly days and nights, before some much-needed rain, and now we are basking in 32 degrees, my fuchsias are wilting in front of my eyes, and the field sprayed with muck six weeks ago is sprouting with a healthy-looking crop. And it is still only May!



This issue has full details of the Bun, Cuppa and Chat Summer Lunch and a Last Survivor piece about Ron Nabarro and *The Medway Queen*, both centenarians and Dunkirk veterans, one who died recently at the age of 104 and the other now moored at Gillingham Pier as a tourist attraction, aged 102. I now have several interesting ideas for future articles, thanks to members of the group, so will feed these in over the coming months, but please keep the ideas and copy coming. Lola, the Toller, (aka Lollipop) makes her writing debut in this issue too, and after two months has made her presence felt in the Steer household. Norman, Nacho, Sugie and I are all exhausted, and Lola-ed out!

Bun, Cuppa and Chat Summer Lunch

Thursday 23 July 2026, 12 noon for 12.30pm

The Mariner's Galley, Rushall

Open to all members of the Group and our voluntary helpers. Accompanying carers/family carers welcome too.

MENU

Starters - £7

Pate

Prawn cocktail

Vegetable soup

Mains - £12

Chicken and Ham suet pudding

Smoked salmon in a dill and lemon sauce

Vegetable moussaka

New potatoes, salads and coleslaw available at the table for people to help themselves

Desserts £6

Syrup sponge pudding and custard

Eton Mess

Apple tart and single cream

There will be a discount of £5 per person from Bun, Cuppa and Chat funds

Please book as soon as possible, but no later than **Monday 6 July**, with your menu choices, to Rosemary Steer, 01379 854245 or rosemaryasteer55@gmail.com.

Payment, preferably in cash or online, by **Monday 13 July**.
Contact Rosemary for details on how to pay online or by cheque.

Please advise of any dietary requirements when booking and whether you need a lift.

Ron Nabarro and *The Medway Queen*

Ron Nabarro, slimly built and wearing spectacles, was an unlikely soldier and *The Medway Queen*, a requisitioned paddle steamer, was an unlikely Royal Navy minesweeper, but both rose to the occasion magnificently during the last War, especially during Operation Dynamo, the retreat from Dunkirk in the Spring of 1940.

Ron Nabarro was born in Hornsey, Middlesex, in 1921, and in 1938 at the age of 17, alarmed by the Nazis' growing power and military strength, he enlisted in the Middlesex Yeomanry. The Yeomanry was a territorial unit within the Royal Corps of Signals, so after the outbreak of war, Nabarro was first deployed as a signaller in London then, in November, his signal section was detailed to go to France to support the 52nd (London) Anti-tank Regiment, Royal Artillery. The problem was that at only 18, Nabarro was too young to serve overseas, so as he said later the solution was 'to amend my age to 19 so that I could stay with the section.'



The Germans launched their attack on the Low Countries on 10 May 1940, and the gun batteries and the Yeomanry's signal section were thrown into the rapidly evolving conflict.

Within days, the Belgian army was in danger of collapsing and a gap opened between it and the BEF's left flank. The BEF was ordered to retreat to Dunkirk, but some units, including Nabarro's, were held back to try to plug the gap. After three days heavy fighting, the regiment and the signallers were ordered to destroy their equipment and make their way to the coast 25 miles away. After failing to be picked up from the beaches north of Dunkirk, Nabarro trekked a further ten miles to the town and on 31 May 1940, he joined the queue at the East Mole on the outskirts of Dunkirk.

Built in 1924 by the Ailsa Shipbuilding Company in Scotland, *The Medway Queen*, a paddle steamer, saw service on the River Medway and the Thames Estuary as part of the Medway Steam Packet Company's fleet based at Rochester in Kent. Over the next 15 years, as a seaside excursion steamer, she plied routes from Strood and Chatham to Sheerness and other Kent towns and to Clacton and Southend in Essex, with little excitement except colliding with Southend Pier in 1929 (causing extensive damage to her bow) and attending the Coronation Fleet Review at Spithead in 1937.



The Medway Queen at Dunkirk

In 1939, *The Medway Queen* was requisitioned by the Royal Navy; her first task was to evacuate children from Gravesend in Essex to East Anglia. She was refitted as a minesweeper with modifications to her stern to take the sweeping gear and a 12-pounder gun and twin Lewis machine guns were added. She served until 1942 as part of the 10th Minesweeping Flotilla, patrolling the English Channel and the Strait of Dover, and then as a training ship. In May 1940, *The Medway Queen* was detailed to join the flotilla of little ships as part of Operation Dynamo, the evacuation of the BEF and other allied troops from the beaches at Dunkirk.

And so, on the 1 June 1940, after a day of waiting on the Mole at Dunkirk, Ron Nabarro clambered aboard *The Medway Queen*, then on her sixth, and penultimate, trip across the Channel to rescue allied troops. There, with hundreds of other troops on board, he was given a hot drink and food and fell asleep until he arrived in Ramsgate the following morning to start seven days furlough. The remnants of the 5th Infantry Divisional Signal Unit, including Nabarro's section, remained in the UK for anti-invasion duties until it was back to full strength. During this time, he met Muriel Eyres, and they agreed that they would marry when he returned from the War. It was a long wait. Nabarro later served in India, Syria and North Africa and was then involved in the invasion of Sicily and then mainland Italy before moving into France, the Netherlands and finally Germany. He was demobbed in 1946 and married Muriel the following year. Ron Nabarro was the last survivor of *The Medway Queen's* Dunkirk evacuees and possibly the last British survivor of Operation Dynamo – known as 'Dunkirk'.

And what of *The Medway Queen*, nicknamed The Heroine of Dunkirk? She made seven return trips to Dunkirk, bringing back about 7000 troops, believed the most of any ship. The crew received seven gallantry medals for their part in Operation Dynamo, which included shooting down three enemy aircraft – two Distinguished Service Crosses, three Distinguished Service Medals and two Mentioned in Dispatches.

She was returned to her owners after the War and continued to run as a pleasure steamer until 1963. She was saved from being broken up when the Belgian ship-breaker realised her history, and after a stint as a nightclub on the Isle of

Wight, in 1978, she passed to new owners who planned to restore her, but she sank in the River Medina when the hull sprang a leak. There she remained, deteriorating with every tide, until salvaged in 1984. The following year, the Medway Queen Preservation Society was founded. but it was not until 2006 that funds were secured for her restoration and work started in 2009. Most of the hull was not salvageable and had to be reconstructed by David Abels Shipbuilders of Bristol, but in 2013 the fully-restored *Medina Queen* was towed from Bristol to her new mooring as a museum and tourist attraction at Gillingham Pier near the Chatham Historic Dockyard.



A sad sight



Moored at Gillingham Pier

Acknowledgements: Wikipedia; Visit Medway website; The Times; and Medway Queen Preservation Society website.



Ron Nabarro visiting *The Medina Queen* during its centenary in 2024

Bun, Cuppa and Chat News

We send good wishes to all members of the group who are unwell or have been in hospital recently, including Jan, Norman, Dick and Miri, Philippa, Gill and Brian, and Pat and Arnold.

Congratulations to Shirley Coe who will be joining the ever growing '90s Club' next month and we wish Terry Pegg all the best for his new life (which sounds amazing!) at the Royal Hospital, Chelsea. I haven't told him yet, but I am expecting regular contributions to the Newsletter from him - 'Chats from a Cheslea Pensioner' perhaps?

Although we try to give lifts to Rushall for all who need it, sometimes a shortage of volunteer drivers (they do need holidays occasionally!) or lack of a suitable car for those with mobility issues, means that we cannot help. So, if you have not already done so, members of the group might wish to join Borderhoppa, a community transport scheme, which offers a dial-a-ride service and regular outings for its members. There is an annual membership fee, and fares payable for outings and dial-a-ride. Please ring 01379 854800 for more information and joining forms.

Our next Bun, Cuppa and Chat is on Thursday 25th June, usual time of 2.30pm and then our Summer Lunch on Thursday 23 July at 12 for 12.30pm. Family member/carers also welcome (as always). Please let us know if you need a lift when booking for the Summer Lunch and please book early as numbers are limited.

MY NEXT LIFE

George Carlin, 1937-2008

I want to live my next life backwards: you start out dead and get that out of the way.

Then you wake up in a nursing home feeling better every day.

Then you get kicked out for being too healthy, enjoy your retirement and collect your pension.

Then when you start work, you get a gold watch on your first day. You work 40 years until you're too young to work.

You get ready for High School: drink alcohol, party, and you're generally promiscuous.

Then you go to primary school, you become a kid, you play, and you have no responsibilities.

Then you become a baby, and then ... you spend your last 9 months floating peacefully in Spa-like conditions – central heating, room service on tap, and then ...

You finish off as an orgasm.

Norman's Chuckle Corner

- ✚ Three men were having a beer in a Texas bar. Hank and Chuck were easy-going guys, but Herbie was deaf which made him a bit tetchy. As they were drinking in walked Red Adair, the famous oilwell firefighter. Hank recognised him immediately and said 'Look, it's Red Adair;' 'So it is', said Chuck. Herbie stood up and said, 'Oh no, it's not'. 'It is,' said Hank, 'It certainly is,' said Chuck. Herbie, still standing, looked at them both and, with a raised voice, said 'I'm telling you it's not, I know what he looks like. I've seen all those films he made with Ginger Rogers.'
- ✚ I cleaned the attic with the wife the other day. Now I can't get the cobwebs out of her hair.
- ✚ A sandwich walks into a bar. The barman says "Sorry we don't serve food in here"
- ✚ Slept like a log last night. Woke up in the fireplace.
- ✚ My friend crossed a Bulldog with a Shih Tzu and ended up with Bulls**t.
- ✚ A Christian couple went to a Kennels which specialised in providing devoutly religious dogs. They were shown a particular dog that could perform religious tricks. When asked to fetch the Bible it did so, and when asked to find the 23rd psalm the dog pawed through the pages until it found the right Psalm. "Wonderful", said the couple and took the dog home. That evening a friend called to see them and was amazed at the tricks the dog performed. 'Does he do ordinary tricks?' asked the friend. They did not know so they said the dog, 'Heel'! The dog instantly jumped up, put one paw on his master's forehead, closed his eyes in concentration and bowed his head.
- ✚ What starts with an E and ends with an E and has one letter in it? An envelope.
- ✚ A chap said he was going to dress up like a small island off Italy. I said, 'Don't be so silly.'
- ✚ A woman goes to a psychiatrist and says, 'Please, you must help me, my husband thinks he's a greyhound - he eats dog food, sleeps in a kennel and even chases hares.' The psychiatrist smiles and says, 'I can cure him, but it will take a lot of money.' 'There's no problem about money', says the woman. 'He's already won four races.'

Musings from Nacho Sugie and Lola

Lola here. I am settling well into my new home, making friends with Nacho and Sugie who are helping me find the best sleeping spots, hunting grounds, sniffs, wallows, bathing spots and rabbit holes. Training is going well (of the Staff that is, I am just perfect) though there are some areas of dispute, such as access to the human bed and the garden pond, which if not resolved may lead to me going on strike. The 'Missus' as she calls herself, says that as Nacho, Sugie and I regard ourselves as The Management, we cannot go on strike, but as a mere worker, she can! Humph!



Mr Snowy, Spotty Dog, Sugie and Little Ol' Me



Nacho here, it's been lovely having Lola joining the family. It was a bit tricky at first because she wants to be in charge all the time, but like most fellas and big brothers, I have given in and just let her get on with it! I'm enjoying having a companion on our adventures and snoozing on the settee, and

am proud that under my tutelage she caught her first rat – it was tiny and she didn't kill it, but it's a start!

Sugie here – I've worked hard to get into the Missus's good books so I can sleep on her bed at night again – looking cute, rat catching (though eating one on the landing carpet was a mistake), posing outside, sitting on laps and generally looking gorgeous, and am pleased to say it paid off!



**The Bun, Cuppa and Chat Group is part of the Benefice of Dickleburgh and the Pulhams,
Rector: The Revd Carl Melville, T. 01379 452029**

Organisers: The Revd Norman Steer and Rosemary Steer, T. 01379 854245

Newsletter Editor, Rosemary Steer, email: rosemarysteer55@gmail.com

Please contact Rosemary if you would like your name removed from the mailing list.