

## ONE MAN'S LOSS

*In this article, Derek Barnard tells us how a clerical plan to build houses was thwarted by secular needs leading, albeit inadvertently, to the preservation of the clear view of Frindsbury Church which we enjoy today.*

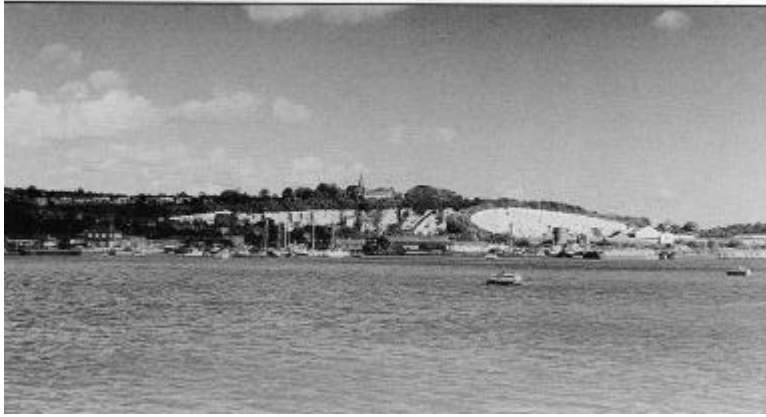
A very different prospect of Frindsbury would have presented itself to the viewer from Rochester had the plans for a housing development, drawn up by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, come to fruition. By 1880, they had purchased a strip of land to enable them to widen the entrance into Station Road from Frindsbury Road. Their intention was to build a new road on the lines of the present Banks Road, not joining Church Green but turning right just above what is now Commissioner's Road and running parallel with it for a short distance before curving up the hill beside and behind the church to meet Upnor Road beside the present Vicarage at the bottom of Parsonage Lane. Some idea of the intense development envisaged can be seen in the roads around St. Mary's Church, Strood, which were part of the same plan.

In 1881, the South Eastern Railway Company presented a Bill in Parliament to allow them to compulsorily purchase some of the Commissioner's land around the canal basin. The basin, with its facility for offloading the cargoes of freight ships directly onto the railway trucks in the sidings was already a profitable business. I believe that this Bill was to allow the railway company to shorten the tunnel to allow room for a railway track to be constructed around the end of the basin to gain access to the Frindsbury side, thus doubling their trade capacity. They also needed more of the cliff to be cut away to allow room for the new sidings.

The Commissioners, fearful of losing access to their own proposed development, lodged a petition with the House of Lords opposing the bill. These two organisations were very powerful, so rather than fight each other, they drew up a compromise agreement to allow free passage of the Bill. It was agreed that forty feet would be left above the tunnel entrance to allow the Commissioners to build their road, that any chalk dug would remain the property of the Commissioners and would be disposed of by them and that no coke ovens or similar buildings would be erected that could cause annoyance to future residents in the proposed houses.

The railway company carried out these works, building their new sidings and later, coke ovens too when the Commissioner's housing scheme did not materialise and the ever increasing demand for chalk for the cement industry became a more lucrative option. So the now familiar pits were dug.

After reading the documents relating to this story, I was sympathetic to the cement industry for the first time in my life. Despite the scars they created, the open aspect left to us is only due to their endeavours and I for one am grateful to them.



Derek Barnard, November 1995