

## QUEEN VICTORIA AND THE BIRDS

Whilst browsing the Flea Market on a sunny summer Saturday. I came across an early postcard of Rochester Castle and its jubilee memorial. When adding it to my collection of odds and ends relating to the castle I found I had a 1950s picture taken from almost the same place, showing a far less imposing structure.

The memorial was erected in 1887 to mark the golden jubilee of the reign of Queen Victoria. It was described as having a tasteful statuette of Her Majesty set under a Gothic canopy. Its sides bore the legend:

Fifty years of ever-broadening commerce

Fifty years of ever-brightening science

Fifty years of ever-widening empire

For whatever reason, it did not survive the ravages of time and by the early 1980s just the paving stones around the base remained within the path surface. When these areas were edged and tarmaced, all traces were lost forever.

It had been a fitting addition to the city's park which had come into being just a few years earlier, when the 'ever-brightening science' had made the authorities aware of the benefit of hygiene and open spaces to the working classes. The Council had persuaded the Earl of Jersey to lease the castle and its bailey to them. A pamphlet was circulated to the local populous extolling the virtues of such a park and asking for donations, as the Earl had insisted that £2000 be spent on it before he granted the lease.

All the usual formalities to celebrate its opening were carried out but the climax to the activities was that the keep would be illuminated by the electric light, and many people were present to witness this unusual event. The night was very dark, the band played a burst of music and a remarkably strong beam of light shone through the darkness with such an effect as to startle all those present. It was not only the spectators who were startled, for the hundreds of pigeons living in the keep rose as one and flew round and round the tower in bewilderment at the sudden turning of night into day. Ah! The wonders of science!



**Jubilee Memorial**



**And the sad Remains**

Derek Barnard