

## Commemoration of the Raid in 1967.

In 1967, the tercentenary of the Medway raid, the English (one might almost say ‘typically’) commemorated this notorious naval defeat which they had suffered. In June a ‘River Medway Dutch Week’ was held, and of course the Dutch were invited to attend. which they did with alacrity and entirely without inhibitions. Racing and social events were arranged for the many Dutch visitors, some of whom arrived in their yachts in this second but peaceful invasion of the Medway. The Dutch Royal Navy also sent over three vessels, while the Royal Navy was represented by the destroyer “*Carysford*” which berthed amicably alongside the Dutch “*Holland*”

The Dutch Press reacted good humouredly to what must have seemed a singular manifestation of the traditional English capacity to be good losers. The ‘*Algemeen Handelsblad*’ in its issue of 2 June 1967 published a short article on the forthcoming week, but at the same time thought it necessary to inform its readers that the Medway was a tributary of the Thames, and that the town of Chatham was situated on it.

The Dutch ambassador, in a message to the people of the Medway Towns, declared that it was a source of real satisfaction to know that three hundred years after a Dutch naval force had invaded the River Medway, an initiative had been taken along the banks of the same river to commemorate the event. Not to be outdone in the exchange of civilities, the ‘*Kent Messenger*’ extended this greeting:

*“To our Dutch friends the Kent Messenger extends this greeting: Welkom in Kent, wij hopen dat U een prettige tijd heeft en veel vrienden zult maken” (Welcome to Kent, we hope that you have a nice time, and make many friends.*

Another frigate of the Royal Netherlands Navy, the “*Fret*” anchored off Admiralty Pier, Gillingham where a Dutch banker, **Mr F.P.J. de Ruyter de Wildt**, 11th generation descendant of Admiral Micheal de Ruyter, stepped ashore, to be welcomed by Councillor Harris, the Mayor of Gillingham, and by Captain Peter Petts, a descendant of Commissioner Peter Pett.



From left to right.

**Mr F.P.J. de Ruyter de Wildt**  
**Councillor Harris, Mayor of Gillingham**  
**Captain Peter Petts**

In his welcoming address he said, “*At first I viewed my coming here with some trepidation, I felt as a descendant of Admiral Nelson who is invited by the French to a celebration of the Battle of Trafalgar*”. Rear-Admiral Parker, admiral of the Nore, interrupted his speech, saying: ‘*We are not celebrating, we are only commemorating*’ but Mr de Ruyter de Wildt, who was interviewed on the fo’c’sle of the “*Fret*”, wittily improvised, while petting the barrel of one of “*Fret*’s” guns looming over his head:

*“But I realised there was no reason for alarm as long as I had the guns of the Royal Dutch Navy behind me like my forefather”*

Councillor Harris presented Mr de Ruyter de Wildt with a small cannonball which had been imbedded in the walls of Upnor Castle, and which was supposed to have been shot from a Dutch gun during the raid.

During the week the Dutch visitors were treated to what was almost a surfeit of exhibitions and displays, sailing races, and dances. On Saturday 10 June a contingent of Dutch sailors, dressed in seventeenth-century costume, marched to Queenborough Guildhall, where the Dutch flag was hoisted by the Captain of the "**Holland**". On Sunday 11 June the Dutch frigate "**Fret**" sailed up the Medway from Sheerness, escorted by yachts and other small craft, and en-route passed through a curtain of coloured water, put up by the firing-tugs. This watery barrier was meant to symbolise the chain which had stretched across the river a few hundred yards below the pont where the "Fret" had anchored and by sailing through it the "**Fret**" breached it again.....!

On Monday the band of the Royal Netherlands Marines played at Upnor Castle before a admiring crowd estimated at three thousand; and the inhabitants of Upnor declared later that there had not been so many visitors to the village within living memory. On Tuesday 13 June the Dutch band led a naval march through the streets of Chatham, and repeated this through the streets of Gillingham on Wednesday. During the evening Anglo-Dutch amity was further cemented when a ceremony was held at Queenborough and that ancient town was twinned with Brielle. On Saturday 17 June the band of H.M. Royal Marines beat retreat near Chatham Town Hall, and in the evening the Dutch flag was lowered from Queenborough Guildhall, and with these two ceremonies, apart from a few final events on Sunday, the River Medway Dutch Week came to an end.

