

**In brief**  
**Demolition of disused toilets**



**Down the pan:** These toilets in Sheerness are being demolished

AN UNLOVED Sheerness toilet block is finally being flushed away. Work has started to demolish the public toilets near McDonalds after months of closure. Supermarket Tesco is paying for the work as part of its expansion plans for its Bridge Road store, which could begin next year and lead to 110 jobs. Contractors moved in last week and, when the toilet block has been removed, it will be landscaped and become a public space.

**Tent set ablaze**

A TENT was set on fire in a field in Minster in a suspected arson attack in the early hours. Firefighters were called to a field off Marian Avenue at 3am last Tuesday. The fire destroyed the camping equipment and took one crew of firefighters from Sheppey Fire Station 15 minutes to put out. Two men, a 19-year-old from Sheerness and a 20-year-old with no fixed address, were arrested and held overnight in custody, but later released without charge.

**Rape accused**

A TEENAGER accused of twice raping a 13-year-old boy in Queenborough will appear at Crown Court on Friday. The 17-year-old youth, who cannot be identified for legal reasons, appeared at Maidstone Magistrates' Court last Monday where he pleaded not guilty to two charges of rape. He was remanded in custody to appear at Maidstone Crown Court on Friday.

**Cyclist injured**

A CYCLIST who fell off his bike over a wall and plunged 8ft was airlifted to hospital for specialist treatment. The man in his 50s came off his bike in Warden Bay Road, injuring his head and ribs at 9.45am on Saturday, September 10. Paramedics called for the air ambulance at 10.30am and the man was airlifted to Queens Hospital in Romford.

**Hearing clinics**

HEARING aid users can have their NHS equipment revitalised at free clinics run by charity Hi Kent. No appointment is necessary, just turn up at Blackburn Lodge, Broadway, Sheerness between 10.30am and 11.30am today (Wednesday) or Age Concern in Trinity Road, Sheerness, from 9.30 to 11am tomorrow (Thursday).

# Time-bomb wreck is more risky than ever

## Report says vessel collapse could spark huge explosion

Report by **Jim Palmer**

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A CATASTROPHIC explosion off the coast of Sheppey is more likely than ever, warn experts, and could happen in the next three years.

A report by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, published earlier this month into the state of the wreck of the SS Richard Montgomery - which sank in August 1944 with 14,000 tonnes of explosives on board - revealed that the rate of deterioration could be increasing and that the ship's collapse is becoming a realistic possibility.

The report said some holes in the boat were big enough to allow explosives to escape, the effect of which could not be predicted.

Despite being underwater for 67 years, the explosive elements of the bombs will not degrade, meaning they continue to be a risk.

While the overall state of the wreck was described as "stable" some areas are deteriorating at an increased rate, and there is an increased risk that part of the wreck - containing 2,000 cases of used and non-used fragmentation cluster bombs, nearly 600 500lb and a thousand 1,000lb bombs containing TNT - will break in two in the future.

The Government's policy is to keep a watchful eye on the wreck, although the report - based on surveys carried out in 2008 and 2009 - acknowledged that could change.



**Warning:** Colin Harvey

The report said: "It has always been noted that there may come a point when the risks associated with non-intervention will become greater than the risks associated with a carefully-planned intervention operation."

A film about the ship - called *The Wreck* - has been made by Swale film-makers Ken Rowles and Colin Harvey, and was screened at Sheerness Promenade on Friday, September 9.

**Revelation**

Mr Harvey, of Hobart Gardens, Sittingbourne, said two bomb disposal experts were present at the screening and one, who had been involved with surveys on the ship, made the startling revelation that he believed it will blow up in the next three years.

Mr Harvey said: "He told me the vessel was totally unsafe. He said he would never set foot on it because it is too dangerous."

If the bombs exploded, Mr Har-



**At risk:** The wreck of the Richard Montgomery could explode in the next three years, experts say

vey said, there were two possibilities - depending on whether it happened at high or low tide.

A high-tide explosion would lead to a tsunami, he said, which would engulf Sheppey, Southend, parts of the Medway towns and low-lying areas of Kent including Faversham. At low tide, the blast could obliterate Sheerness and part of Southend.

Mr Harvey said the wreck was too fragile to dismantle and that the only option would be a controlled explosion, which would be

the largest in history. It would involve clearing a huge area and draining the gas terminals at Grain.

Others have suggested building a coffer dam around the ship, draining the water and then either concreting over it or removing the explosives. Mr Harvey said concrete would not make the bombs safe, while the removal process would be too risky.

Sittingbourne and Sheppey MP Gordon Henderson said he had been working on what should be

done with the Richard Montgomery for "some time".

He said that when transport minister Mike Penning was on the island earlier this year he raised the issue and demanded an up-to-date report on the wreck.

He added: "My view as an islander is that I am not expert enough to be able to make a decision. I would leave it up to the experts. The last report that was issued said it would be more dangerous to remove it than leave it where it is."

## Progress made on new council hub

SCAFFOLDING still surrounds its outside and the windows are boarded up, but inside work on the old Woolworths in Sheerness High Street is nearing completion.

In May, construction firm Birkby started on the £1.15million project to turn the 70-year-old building into a one-stop-shop for council services, called the Sheerness Gateway. It is due to be complete next month.

Once finished, the two-floor Kent County Council and Swale Council-funded gateway will be home to a range of services including a library, benefits officers and social services.

Swale Council will move its district office from the Trinity Road site.

Demolition and structural alterations have been completed and an old lift has been removed. Work on electrical installations, internal wall linings and new staircases has started.

For more information about the gateway and what it will offer, contact Modupe Dostunmu at Swale Council by e-mail at modupedostunmu@swale.gov.uk or call 01795 417518.

**Making progress:** The new Sheerness Gateway in the town's High Street



## Cakes sought for charity coffee event

HAVE a coffee for a good cause in Queenborough on Friday, September 30.

Castle Connections in Railway Terrace will host an event as part of Macmillan Cancer Support's annual fundraiser, the World's Biggest Coffee Morning, which takes place from 11am to 4pm.

Anyone willing to help on the day should contact Castle Connections on 01795 661277 or Betty Allsworth on 01795 663634, or e-mail bettyallsworth@talktalk.net.

Donations of cakes will be welcome on Thursday or Friday, September 29 or 30.

### Local information

**HOSPITALS**

The minor injuries unit at Sheppey Community Hospital is open seven days a week, 9am to 9pm. Call 01795 879100

**BLOOD TESTS**

Sheppey Hospital 8am to 2pm Monday to Friday.

**CHEMISTS**

Duty chemist Sunday 10am to 4pm Tesco Pharmacy, Bridge Road, Sheerness. 01795 567649.

**DENTISTS**

Emergency dental clinics are held at various sites across Kent on a rota basis. Call DentalLine on 01634 890300 between 7pm and 10.30pm on weekdays; 9.30am to 11am,

7pm to 10.30pm weekends and bank holidays.

**COUNCILS**

Swale Council's out-of-hours services: When council offices are shut, messages may be left on 01795 424341.

**FURNITURE**

For donations of good quality

furniture, contact the Neighbourhood Furniture Store on 01795 478550 between 8am and 4pm, Monday to Friday.

**AL-ANON**

The Al-Anon family group meets in Sittingbourne from 4pm on Sundays. Call 01795 478047 for details.

**WATER**

To report a leak, contact either Southern Water's leak line on 0800 820999 or Mid Kent Water on 0800 614366

**GAS**

If you smell gas, call Transco the national gas emergency service, for free on 0800 111999.

**TIDES**

High tides at Sheerness until September 27

Wed	0626 (4.8)	1859 (4.8)
Thu	0736 (4.9)	2022 (4.7)
Fri	0903 (4.7)	2151 (5.0)
Sat	1023 (5.1)	2301 (5.4)
Sun	1125 (5.4)	2357 (5.7)
Mon	1216 (5.8)	0045 (6.0)
Tue	1302 (6.0)	---- (----)