

Tonbridge History

Autumn 2010



TONBRIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Photo above: Before Tonbridge had a Historical Society it had an Antiquarian and Scientific one, formed in 1896 and disbanded in 1947. Here members are shown on an excursion to Mayfield in 1906.

From the Chairman:

It seems appropriate that as the leaves turn gold this autumn the Tonbridge Historical Society launches its 50th Anniversary Programme.

This Newsletter contains fascinating details of the founding of the THS, and we are lucky that several of the original members are still actively involved and able to share their knowledge and recollections with us.

By remaining faithful to the sound principles put in place fifty years ago, the THS continues to offer a diverse range of both lectures and research to a community that has almost doubled in size since its inception.

The autumn programme is shown later in this Newsletter and includes some celebratory meetings which we hope as many members as possible will be able to attend during a stimulating anniversary year.

Jenny Poxon

— 1960 —



— 2010 —

Society News

Tonbridge Historical Society

Founded: 1960

President – Joy Debney

Past Presidents – Stella Hardy MBE,
Joan Thirsk CBE, Christopher
Chalklin

Committee

Chairman – Jenny Poxon

Vice Chairman – Audrey Barber

Secretary – Shiela Broomfield,
8 Woodview Crescent, Hildenborough,
Tonbridge TN11 9HD

Treasurer – Pat Mortlock,
6 Keswick Close, Tonbridge TN9 1LP

Minutes & Archives – Sally Robbins
*Pictorial Records Collection and Kent
History Federation Liaison*
– Pat Hopcroft

Programme – Shiela Broomfield and
Jenny Poxon

Publicity & Website – Anthony Wilson

Social Events – Gill Cowlard

Summer Visits – vacant

Other Committee Members:

George Buswell

Deborah Cole

Joy Debney

Vanessa King

Madge Woods

website: www.tonbridgehistory.org.uk

Subscription: £7 per person (£3.50 for
under-18s), due on 1st March annually
for the following season.

From the Secretary

I am enclosing with this Newsletter your programme card, and booking forms for the special Anniversary Lecture at Judd School on 14th October and for the afternoon meeting on 13th November. The Committee has decided that members may attend the October event at no extra cost although a ticket will be needed so that the exact number attending will be known. Students will also be admitted at no cost but other visitors will be charged £3.50. Again I must stress that admission to this event will be by ticket only.

Booking is also required for the November afternoon meeting, which is for members only. There will be no charge for the tea this year.

Application forms may be handed in at our September meeting, or sent by post (see left for my address).

Shiela Broomfield

Forthcoming events

All meetings are in the Riverside Room at the Angel Centre unless otherwise stated.

Thursday 9th September, 7.45 pm

The first lecture of the new season will be given by Luke Ramsden who is Head of History at Tonbridge School. He has agreed to speak on 'Louis XIV' and has given us the following thoughts: 'my immediate idea is that the modern description of him as Stalin without a telephone might be a good starting point – Louis XIV as a particular type of ruler, and a type of ruler that is pretty common in history. This would allow some wider thoughts

rather than a narrow analysis just of this ruler'. Sounds interesting and thought-provoking!

50th Anniversary Lecture

Thursday 14th October, 7.45 pm in the Judd School Hall (tickets required; booking form enclosed with this Newsletter).

The speaker will be Lord Robert Sackville and the lecture will be based on his recently published book 'Inheritance – The Story of Knole and the Sackvilles'. A reviewer describes the book as 'an entertaining read'. The author mentions that Vita Sackville-West described the Sackvilles as 'a rotten lot, and nearly all stark staring mad'. So the talk should reveal a new facet of a place that many of us love and have visited often.

Saturday 13th November, 2.30 pm
(booking required)

The Saturday afternoon meeting has a slightly different format this year primarily to allow our members to meet and celebrate 50 years of THS. It will start with a theatrical presentation entitled 'The Magpie', given by Kate Glassock. It concerns the wives of Henry VIII, seen through the eyes of a waiting woman, and comes with many recommendations. This will be followed by the usual tea, which this year will include a celebration cake.

Thursday 9th December, 7.45 pm

The December talk returns to the subject of Railways in West Kent and will be given by John Arkell and Dan Garrett from the South Eastern & Chatham Railway Society. The Society

has used many photographs from our own collection in their publications. We hope to have some festive refreshments as well at this meeting.

Thursday 3rd February 2011, 7.45 pm

This month will see the welcome return of Dr John Williams who recently retired as the County Archaeologist based in KCC. His subject is 'The origins and early development of towns in Kent'. John's talks are always very well researched and interesting so this is not to be missed.

Thursday 10th March, 7.45 pm

For the March meeting we will welcome Kathy Chaney, who is site librarian at Salomons, the Tunbridge Wells campus of Canterbury Christ Church University. Her responsibilities include the history side of the estate and the Salomons Museum. Her talk is entitled 'The Salomons of Broomhill – immigrants and English gentlemen'.

Thursday 7th April, 7.30 pm

The final lecture of the season is on 7th April (this date will avoid clashing with the dance festival as happened last April!) After the AGM there will be a talk by Paul Cuming on 'The work of the KCC Heritage Conservation team and recent discoveries in Kent'. Paul has sent me this about his talk: 'Kent County Council plays an important role in the development control process in Kent, and in particular in conserving the archaeological sites and historic landscapes of the county. We also maintain the Kent Historic Environment Record, a database of archaeological discoveries and historic buildings, help with research projects and produce reports and publications

to promote Kent's remarkable heritage. In this talk I will review the role of the team in conserving the heritage of Kent and highlight some recent projects and publications. I will discuss ways in which people or societies can help us by volunteering and hopefully identify ways in which we can help local researchers. I will then discuss some of the most significant recent archaeological discoveries.' This sounds like a very fitting end to our 50th year celebrations.

I do hope that you will find the programme interesting. Please let me know what you think and also send me any other thoughts and recommendations. *Shiela Broomfield*

AGM report

At the 2010 AGM in April, Ron Martin, Maureen McLeod and Chris Easeman stood down from the committee. Ron has served on the committee for many years and was chairman a few years ago. He will be much missed as will Maureen and Chris. Maureen has agreed to help with liaising with the Angel Centre which is a great help. We welcome Deborah Cole and Vanessa King to the committee. At the AGM I announced that I would be standing down from the post of secretary so we are actively seeking someone to take on this interesting and important role. I have been doing the job for fifteen years and feel that it is time for someone else to give their expertise to the Society. Please think about this and get in touch with me if you feel that you would like to take this on. It is a friendly, supportive and interesting committee and I have been very grateful to them all. *Shiela Broomfield*

New members

We welcome the following who have recently joined the Society: Pam and Noel Sharland, and Pamela Boorman.

Recent Meetings

The final two meetings in 2009-10 completed a varied and interesting programme. In March, Helen Allison in 'Farewell To Kent' looked at the way in which 19th century emigrants to different parts of the Empire had their passage costs paid for by their parish – Headcorn was the first in 1824 at a cost of £8 per passage and £1 for clothes.

In April, after the AGM, Vanessa King gave a fascinating glimpse into 'Sightseeing in the Middle Ages' including the fact that in the 12th century the most popular places for visitors were Stonehenge, Cheddar Gorge and the Peak District caverns.

Our summer visits to the Society of Genealogists and to Down House, the home of Charles Darwin, were much enjoyed by those who attended.

Medway on Screen

A leaflet about this event is enclosed with this Newsletter. Public events in Tonbridge are as follows:

In September

Thursday 23rd, 6.00-7.30 pm, Angel Centre: launch event

Monday 27th, 11.00 am-3.30 pm, Tonbridge Library: drop-in session.

Thursday 30th, 4.00-8.00 pm, Angel Centre: discovery day

In October

Wednesday 6th, 11.00 am-3.30 pm, Tonbridge Library: drop-in session.

Friday 8th, 11.00 am-3.30 pm: Tonbridge Library, drop-in session.

50th Anniversary Exhibition

There was a good response to our request for new photographs for the 50th Anniversary Project so we are now planning an exhibition of Tonbridge photographs comparing views of the town today with those taken in the 1960s. To add further interest to this display we will also include some of the very old favourites that we all enjoy.

Look out for the exhibition in the Library during September.

Early photographs of our society meetings and events will also be of interest to members and there will be a small display of these at one of our meetings in the autumn.

Thanks to all members who have contributed photographs for the record especially those who have allowed us to copy treasured family photos. I am happy to answer any queries about the Pictorial Record. *Pat Hopcroft*

The beginnings of the Tonbridge Historical Society

The Society was formed because of considerable interest being shown in local history during a series of public lectures held in the autumn of 1959.

The lectures had been arranged jointly by the heads of the public library and the technical institute (the forerunner of the Adult Education Centre). Initially they were held in what was then the largest room in the library. However they were attended by more people than could be comfortably accommodated there. The venue was therefore changed to the hall in the technical institute where the Society

met until recently.

The first lecture was given by Douglas Elliott on archives of Tonbridge. He worked for a local printing firm, and was the honorary archivist of the Tonbridge Urban District Council. Before coming to Tonbridge he had worked on the archives of the last Duke of Chandos.

The success of the lectures led Miss Stella J. Hardy, the librarian, to call a meeting at the library in February 1960, at which the Society was formed. Four of the people present have belonged continuously since then. *continued >*



Leading lights: left, Kenneth Beach and Stella Hardy in 1964; centre, Gwenth Hodge in 1964; right, Stella Hardy, Christopher Chalklin and Sydney Simmons in 1970. (Courier photos)

The Society's first meeting was held on 24th March. Members were enrolled, for a subscription of ten shillings and sixpence. Then Mr Elliott gave a lecture on 'Tonbridge Parish Registers'.

Next there were three summer outings. Sixty-six members and friends visited Ightham Mote and then had tea at the Old Forge, Plaxtol. On a July evening there were visits to the parish church and the Portreeve's House. Finally there was a visit to Tonbridge Castle, conducted by Sydney Simmons, who was Engineer and Surveyor to the T.U.D.C. and in recent years has been a leading member of the Society.

In 1960-1961 there was a series of lectures with the titles 'The social structure of medieval Kent', 'Tonbridge School', 'Stuart Tonbridge', 'Unearthing London' and 'Heraldry'. One of the speakers was C. W. Chalklin, now one of the Past Presidents of the Society.

Several study groups were formed. They included a 'Photographic Studies' group, which still flourishes as the 'Pictorial Records' group.



389 people attended at Judd School in October 1963 to hear Sir Mortimer Wheeler on 'Digging up history'. (Courier photo)

The first two-session meeting was held in 1963, and was entitled 'Tonbridge in early times'. The tea, provided by outside caterers, cost three shillings.

Thus from the start the Society's activities have been much as they are today. In the early years, however, there were more lectures by distinguished speakers, including A. L. Rowse, Sir Mortimer Wheeler, A. J. P. Taylor and C. V. Wedgwood.

The Society has been fortunate that over the years many people have worked hard to contribute to its success. At this time, however, it is appropriate to remember particularly the three most influential founder members: Stella Hardy; Kenneth Beach, the Principal of the technical institute; and Gwenyth Hodge, the local studies librarian. By involving themselves extensively in the running of the Society, and by providing a base and contact point at the library and a suitable venue for meetings, they ensured that the Society became established firmly. *John Boulding*



A. J. P. Taylor (centre) with Kenneth Beach and Margaret Stephens during a visit to Tonbridge in 1979. (Courier photo)

'Salus populi suprema lex'

For a hundred years Tonbridge's town motto was a quotation from Cicero: 'Salus populi suprema lex'. It was chosen in the 1870s by John Gorham, a doctor and notable figure in the town for almost the whole of Victoria's reign. In English the motto declares that 'the health of the people is the supreme law', a sentiment which reflects Gorham's long, and eventually successful, campaign for improved sanitation in Tonbridge. This had begun after a smallpox epidemic killed 39 people in the town in 1854, most of them children. Years of wrangling and prevarication followed before a Local Board of Health was set up, with Gorham a founder member, and Tonbridge at last got proper sewers and a sewage works.

John Gorham was educated at Tonbridge School and at the age of 14 was apprenticed to a local surgeon apothecary, William James West. After training at Guy's he returned to the town as West's partner in 1839, continuing to practise in Tonbridge until his death in 1899.

The partnership of West and Gorham eventually evolved into today's Warders medical practice in East Street, and it is a recent partner at Warders, Dr John Ford, who has now completed a detailed study of Gorham's life and times. A copy of his doctoral thesis entitled 'John Gorham

1814-1899: Victorian medicine in Tonbridge' is available on request in the archive room at Tonbridge Reference Library.



John Gorham

John Ford's study is a substantial addition to the literature on Victorian Tonbridge. It brings together all that can be discovered about his predecessor's medical activities in the town, gleaned from local newspapers and other sources, but more than this it sets Gorham's life and work in the wider context of developments in 19th-century Tonbridge and of small-town medicine in general at that time.

Gorham was more than just a doctor. He was a 'Gentleman Scientist' in the Victorian tradition, interested particularly in microscopy, devising



Mary Gorham

new gadgets and reporting his findings in papers to the London learned societies. As a leading figure in Tonbridge life he helped found the Mechanics' Institute and regularly spoke and read at its meetings. As a flautist he was much in demand in the Amateur Musical Society. His brother William was a solicitor in the town whose daughter Mary set up St Eanswythe's Mission Hall in Priory Road.

Yet John Gorham's life is not without contradictions. In the 1850s he was in court for fraudulently attempting to obtain an inheritance from a dying

patient, leading to a judge describing him as someone 'whose memory was not merely defective' but who 'imagined things which did not occur'. Later he was forced to resign as Poor Law Doctor for the Tonbridge Union after charging for services he had not in fact rendered.

Gorham's reputation in the town

seems to have survived these setbacks. On his death in 1899 he was recalled with affection as a man who did a great amount of good for the town – and also as the doctor who once delivered a baby in a railway carriage at Tonbridge station, delaying the train by a mere thirty minutes while he did so.

Anthony Wilson

From the archives – War over Tonbridge

In the late summer and autumn of 1940, as the Battle of Britain was coming to an end and heavy bombing was on the increase, Mr Frank Richardson, living alongside the railway at 33 Albert Road, was sending regular reports by letter to members of his family.

Copies of these letters are now in the THS archives. They form a vivid eye-witness diary of the war in the air as experienced by Tonbridge people at that time.

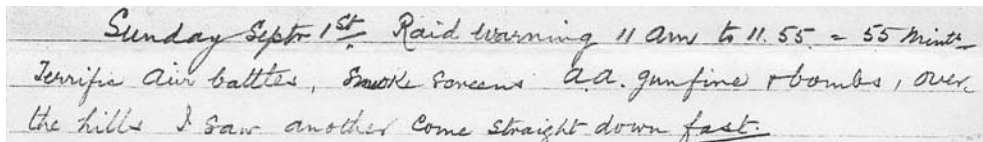
The following extracts give the flavour:

Saturday August 3rd: at 1 am a bomb exploded in our back garden, and we heard two more, also a package of letters printed from Hitler's July 19th speech 'a last appeal to reason', they dropped in Postern Heath.... We got about 60 planes a day over, and they are good for they chase most of the enemy off.

Monday August 26th: [air raid] 9.15 pm to 4.30 am. The searchlights were a grand display, 30 were playing on ones spot and I saw a white plane in the centre.

Thursday September 5th: Tonbridge bombed at last. They dropped 5 whistling bombs which we heard and I thought it was a plane in trouble. One dropped in Dr Tucket's garden in Yardley Park and upset his house a bit, two in Cornwallis Avenue... and two in a field beyond the cemetery.

Friday September 27th 2.30-3.55 pm. We counted more than 100 go over and from Chatham all the way over shells were bursting all round them. Then our planes came over and what an air fight



Sunday Sept 1st Raid warning 11 am to 11.55 = 55 mins
Terrific air battles, smoke screens, a.a. gun fire & bombs, over
the hills I saw another come straight down fast.

...they brought a lot down and chased the others off, so that only ours were left in the sky. It was grand. Five down at P. Wood, one at Tudeley, ... one at 7'oaks.

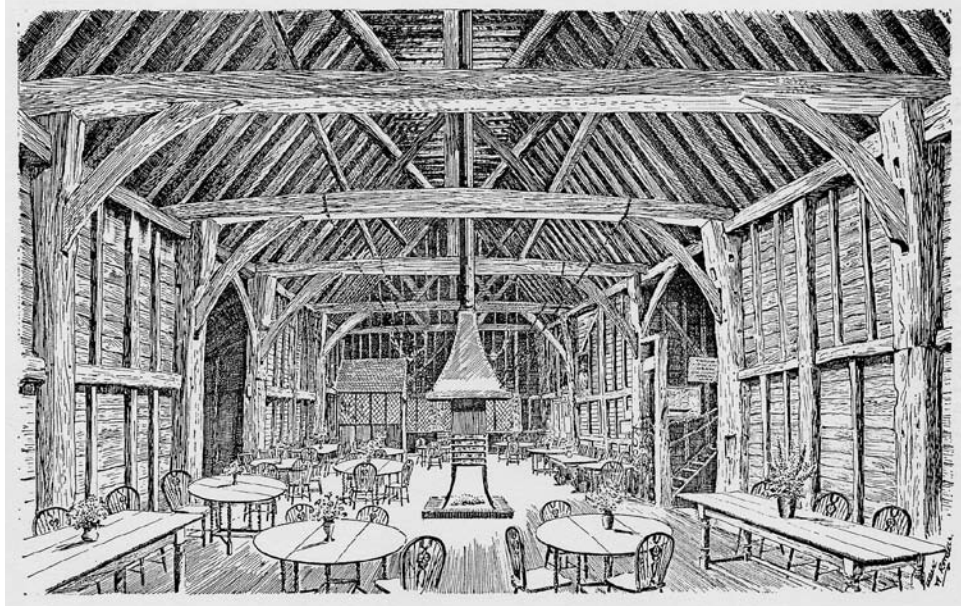
Friday October 4th: 16 bombs during the day and they tried to get the railway, water works and gas works but they failed. 7 dropped on T'n. - 3 on Hect'rage all otments, one on a corner house in Vale Road, one in B'otany near Gas House, 2 on the sports ground.

Monday October 28th: That Blenheim of ours which came down inflames on Dernier Rd. on three houses, killed 3 and injured 15, yet the Germans have killed Nobody here yet.

Wednesday November 6th: 5.30am, 12 bombs. Loud. Many windows smashed in the L'nd on Rd. at 6.55pm we heard one hellish bomb. It was dropped at the Powder mills. They still think we are manufacturing there, but we haven't for years.

Memory Lane

Can you identify this impressive local building – now gone? Answer below.



The Old Barn Teahouse in Stocks Green Road, Hildenborough, famed for its teas served with 'Oceans of Cream'. Originally a timber barn, the building was leased out as a Night Club in the 1990s but soon burned down. New housing now occupies the site.

100 years ago – from the Tonbridge Free Press

13th May 1910: "The Nation's Sorrow"

Tonbridge joins in mourning the demise of King Edward. The astounding and almost incomprehensible news of the passing away of our beloved King Edward VII coming as it did with such painful suddenness rendered the entire nation inarticulate. It caused a feeling of awed consternation throughout the country and now the Empire is plunged



May 9th 1910: Tonbridge people gather near the Chequers on a dull and gloomy day for the proclamation of the new King, George Vth.

into grief. The deepest and sincerest regrets will be felt throughout the whole world, for our late sovereign was dear to the hearts of all.

Sadness when the distressing message containing the news became known in our midst quickly manifested itself in the town. Flags fluttered at half mast in the sun and the bells sent forth their muffled mournful message. Business lost its briskness, functions were quickly postponed and there was a sudden lugubrious lull in the life and stir of the town.

Postponements included Tonbridge

F.C. Annual concert, Judd Commercial School Sports Day, Women's Adult School Concert, Tonbridge North Ward Conservative Association Smoking Concert.'

June 10th 1910: Letter from the Home Secretary

'I am commanded by the King to convey to you hereby His Majesty's thanks to the inhabitants of the town of Tonbridge

on the occasion of the lamented death of his late Majesty King Edward VII. I am to say that the expression of sympathy with Queen Alexandra has been laid before Her Majesty who desires me to

communicate to you her thanks. I am, Sir, your obedient servant, Winston S. Churchill, Home Secretary'.

17th June 1910 Tonbridge Cricket Week

'Win for Kent against Sussex

First innings:

Kent 138 all out, Sussex 98 all out

Second innings:

Kent 270 all out, Sussex 146 all out.

Frank Woolley, though failing with the bat (only scoring 14 runs in the match) bowled splendidly taking 9 wickets in the match for less than 5 runs a wicket.

As picturesque as ever the Angel Ground was the scene during the first

part of the Week of the encounter between Kent and our near neighbours Sussex and large crowds were attracted to the ground. It is without doubt the event of the year and ordinary business, to an extent, is at a deadlock

for many regard the Week as one for holidaymaking and we feel our first duty is to congratulate all concerned upon having successfully steered the event through a period of years until it has attained its majority’.



*County Cricket on the Angel Ground, early 20th century.
The wicket was roughly where the (west) entrance of Beales is today.*

Here and there

Kent Archaeological Society: The Churches Committee of the Kent Archaeological Society is looking for some one to join it from our area – I am sure that one of you is interested in joining this interesting committee – you don’t need to be a KAS member.
THS Website: Recent additions to the Society’s website include a page about the first Bishop of Tonbridge, Russell White, and a sequence of maps showing how Tonbridge has grown over 250 years. Twenty-five thousand people have now used the site. If you are a web user and have not already done so, do take a look. The address is www.tonbridgehistory.org.uk.

‘The Green Silk Dress’: Historical fiction aficionados may be interested in this book by Tonbridge author Marie Cross. The setting is Golden Green and the surrounding area in the 1850s, and hop-picking is a prominent theme, culminating in the Hartlake Bridge tragedy of October 1853. ‘The Green Silk Dress’ is available from the author at 35 Exeter Close, Tonbridge TN10 4NT for £6.

War Memorial Garden: The Council wish to improve the War Memorial Garden, between Bradford Street and the river, to the highest possible standard and have therefore put aside £25,000 towards an estimated cost of roughly £100,000. Our Society will be consulted on the design and there is now a fundraising committee under the leadership of Patrick Tootal, a Deputy Lieutenant of Kent. In the next few weeks you will see publicity about this and there will be a chance for everyone to pledge a little money towards making the Garden rather more worthy for its purpose. *Pat Mortlock*

New History Courses in Tonbridge

WEA courses

Exploring Medieval Landscapes and Buildings: Tutor, David Carder, Tuesdays 10.15-12.15 for 10 weeks from 28/9/2010, £75

Cathedrals and Greater Churches of Europe from the 10th to 20th century: Tutor, Hubert Pragnell, Tuesdays 10-12 for 10 weeks from 11/1/2011, £75

Both these are held at Tonbridge Bowls Club, off Darenth Avenue.

Travellers and Armchair Tourists in the Middle Ages: Tutor, Vanessa King, Thursdays 10-12 for 10 weeks from 30/9/2010, £75

Spin doctoring in the Middle Ages: Tutor, Vanessa King, day school, Saturday 27/11/2010, 10.30-15.30, £26

Both these are held at the Adult Education Centre, Avebury Avenue.

Further details about WEA courses are available from Tonbridge Library, on <http://southern.wea.org.uk>, or from Jill Britcher, tel. 01233 634410.

Kent Adult Education Courses

A series of one day courses in the Adult Education Centre, Saturdays 10 am-3 pm, £35 each.

Family History Introduction, 9/10/2010

Roman Kent, 6/11/2010

Medieval Kent, 27/11/2010

Elizabethan Kent, 15/1/2011

Victorian Kent, 5/3/2011

Further details about KAE Courses are available in the Library, or on www.kentadulteducation.co.uk.