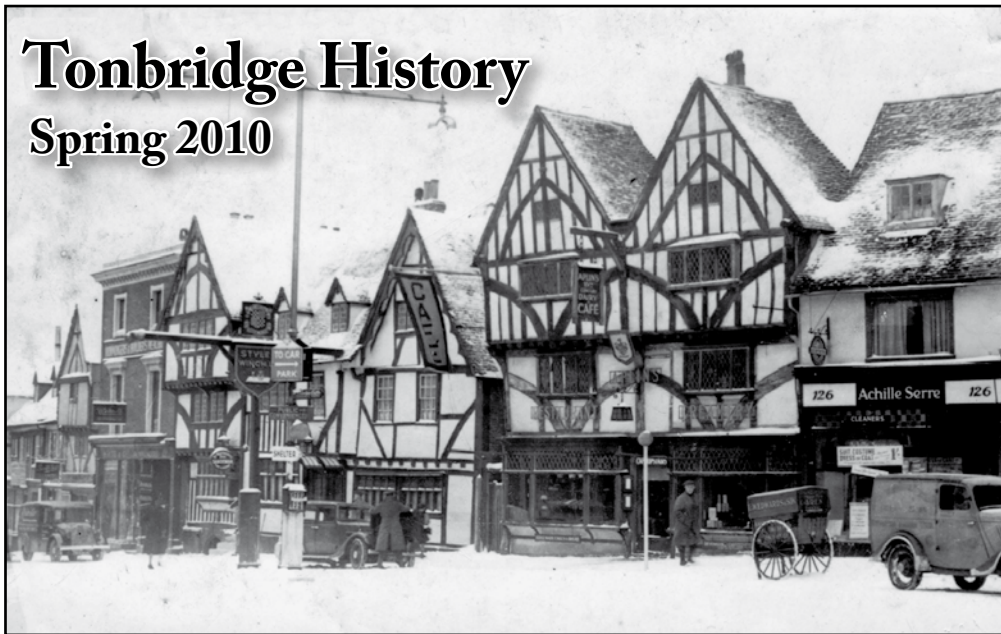


Tonbridge History

Spring 2010



TONBRIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Photo above: A wintry scene in the High Street. Aplin's Café occupies the building with large gables, now Moss Bros, with the Chequers beyond. The photo was taken some time between 1935 and 54.

From the Chairman:

It's 2010. We have survived the winter's snow and ice and Tonbridge Historical Society has a new-style Newsletter. All the essential THS information is still here but with a bright new layout and the addition of items of general historical interest.

As we look forward to the Spring programme, remember there is the opportunity for us all to chat over a cup of tea or coffee (free!) before the start of each meeting. This is one of the features we can enjoy since we have changed the venue to the comfort of the Angel Centre.

Later this year THS celebrates its fiftieth anniversary and we are planning events to mark the achievement. It is a pleasure to think we have members who have been with us from the beginning alongside a thriving new membership and that we are pursuing the same ends in a splendidly evolving context.

This fiftieth year is indeed something to celebrate!

Jenny Poxon

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

Joy Debney

Chris Easeman

Ron Martin

Maureen McLeod

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.

A Membership Renewal Form is
distributed with this Newsletter.

From the Secretary

2010 is a great milestone for our Society as it marks 50 years since the first lecture, which took place on Thursday 22nd September 1960 given by J A McLean MA on *The Social Structure of Medieval Kent*.

We hope to have many interesting events to celebrate this including a special lecture open to all on Thursday 14th October 2010 at Judd School. I am very pleased to say that Robert Sackville-West (Lord Sackville) has accepted our invitation to speak on *Inheritance: The Story of Knole and the Sackvilles*. I have just had confirmation that the Mayor has the event in his diary and hopes to attend. I do hope that as many of you as possible will help us to celebrate. Further details will be included with the next Newsletter.

This is the time of year when I put in a plea for help especially on the Committee – we are still lacking a visits organiser and also someone to organise the lecture programme. If you would like to know more please contact me. Nominations, signed by the applicant plus at least one other member, need to be with me by 30th March 2010. Of course we are also able (and willing!) to co-opt anyone.

I am so grateful for the help and friendship given to me by the Committee. For the time being Jenny Poxon and I are putting together what we hope is going to be an interesting programme starting in September. Full details will be sent to you in the Summer.

Shiela Broomfield

New members

We welcome the following, who have joined the Society since the end of last season:

| | |
|--------------------|------------------|
| Lawrence Broad | Gerda Hayward |
| Natalie Broad | Peter Hayward |
| Joyce Cahill | Sue Knight |
| Peter Clack | Jane Lloyd |
| Margaret Dimbylow | Kathryn Parish |
| Joanna Dunlop | Deborah Pethrick |
| Lisa Foxley-Hughes | V. Richards |
| | Nancy Roffe |

Archaeology

Members who attended Lyn Palmer's talk on the Weald Forest Ridge Project will know that this is a very interesting project. Further details are on the web at www.highweald.org. If you would like to be involved locally please send your details to me. *Shiela Broomfield*

Forthcoming events

Thursday 11th March, 7.45 pm in the Angel Centre. Talk: 'Farewell to Kent' – emigration in the 19th century.

Thursday 15th April, 7.30 pm in the Angel Centre. AGM followed by talk on Sightseeing in the Middle Ages. Details are on a separate sheet enclosed with this Newsletter.

Wednesday 5th May (morning) Visit to Society of Genealogists Library. Details on separate sheet.

Thursday 20th May (afternoon) Visit to Down House, the home of Charles Darwin. Details on separate sheet.

Thursday 14th October, at Judd School. THS 50th Anniversary Lecture by Lord Sackville. The full programme for the 2010-11 season will be in the next Newsletter.

Recent meetings

The autumn meetings held in the Angel Centre were all well attended, with members having the opportunity to enjoy tea or coffee before the start.

In *September* one of our own members, Anthony Wilson, marked the Darwin Centenary Year with a fascinating, well-illustrated talk looking at the use Darwin made in his scientific investigations of his garden at Down House. Members will have the chance to look round Down House and the garden in a society visit on 20th May.

In *October* the historian Marc Morris gave a lively talk about one of the great English kings – Edward I. Marc was impressed by the interest shown by members, and by the number of copies of his new book about Edward bought by members after the talk!

In *November* Christine Lalumia from the Geffrye Museum gave a two part lecture looking at paintings of domestic town gardens in the 18th-20th centuries. It was fascinating to appreciate how much information about social habits and customs, as well as gardening styles, can be learnt from close examination of a painting.

At the *December* meeting Rosina Robinson looked at the history of Lace and Lace Making using exhibits passed round the audience to help illustrate her talk. Meanwhile an assistant was lace-making during the talk.

Lyn Palmer made a welcome return to open the Spring Programme in *February*. She gave a fascinating talk about her work with the Historic Environment Awareness Project in the Weald Forest Ridge Area, particularly the value of the aerial survey system LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging).

A German POW in Tonbridge

The Society has received a copy of a diary kept by a German soldier who was held in the POW camp at Somerhill in World War 2. His name was Vinzenz Fetzter who was captured in France and arrived at Camp 40 (Somerhill) in April 1945. He remained a prisoner until 1948. The camp consisted of rows of wooden huts, located on Somerhill land that is now part of the grounds of the Weald of Kent Grammar School.

Vinzenz' grandson, Jochem Fetzter, now has the diary, and was put in touch with us when on holiday in this country last year. He has sent us copies of the pages covering his grandfather's time in Tonbridge, which are currently being deciphered and translated by one of our members, Joyce Buswell – no mean feat as can be seen from the sample below.

The diary includes descriptions of camp life and of his 'military unit' (both of these are written in verse), as well as his thoughts about the whole Nazi episode. We hope it may be possible eventually to put some more of it on the

THS website.

Vinzenz was 39 when he arrived in Tonbridge, and had been a gardener in Stuttgart before the war. Being sent to a camp in our part of the country was a stroke of good fortune. His delight in the Kentish countryside is apparent in the extract given here.

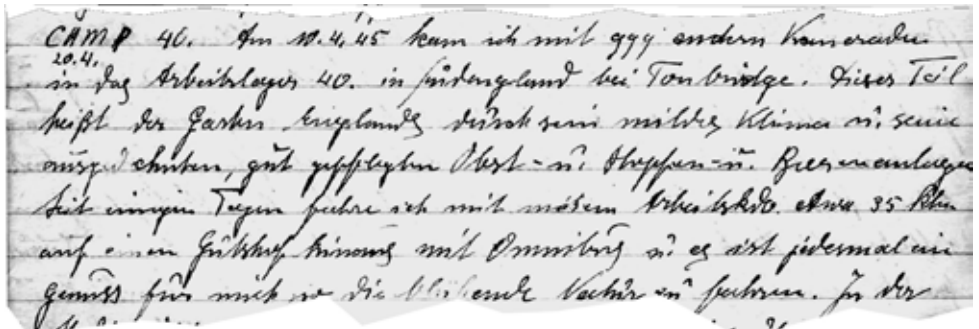
After his release Vinzenz returned to his parents' farm in Denkingen in south-west Germany and set up his own garden nursery. He died in 1978.

This is part of the diary entry describing Fetzter's early days in Kent:

"On the 10th of April 1945 I arrived, with other comrades, at work camp 40 in southern England near Tonbridge. This area is called the Garden of England because of its mild climate and well-tended orchards, hop fields and oast houses. For several days now I have been travelling with my work party by omnibus to a farm about 35 kilometres away and every time it is a pleasure for me to drive through such thriving activity. In the towns you can see in front of most of the houses a



Vinzenz Fetzter in 1942



Part of a page of the diary; the original is larger

neat and pretty front garden filled with flowers. The villas on the edge of town have correspondingly larger gardens, also flower-bedecked. The lovely English lawn is prominent. You also find tastefully arranged rock gardens with flowering plants. At the moment in bloom are shrub carnations, tulips, narcissi, trumpet lilies, forget-me-nots, lilac and hedgerows of

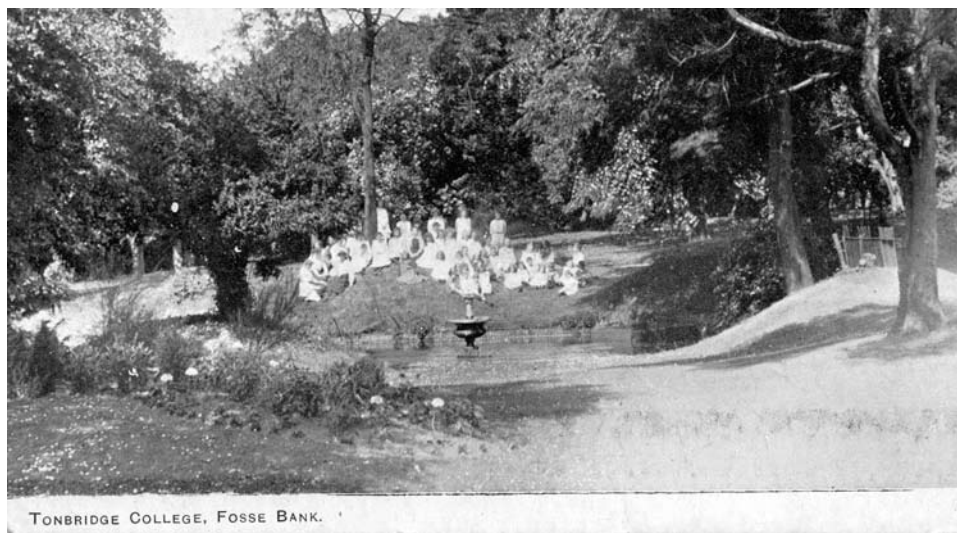
Japanese cherry, primulas and the many rockery flowers. The orchards in blossom are also a splendid sight – mainly apples, also damson plums, some cherries and pears. Cider is produced from the apples which are not eaten fresh. This is sweet and sometimes fermented. From the plums a fruity jam is made. I have also seen a hazelnut plantation.”

New acquisition: The Fosse Bank archive

An important recent addition to the Society’s Pictorial Archive Collection is a series of photograph albums covering the history of Fosse Bank School. They have been donated by a former pupil, Tina Reynolds, who rescued them when the school closed on its Quarry Hill site. The school – Tonbridge’s longest-lasting private school – was founded as Tonbridge Girls’ College in 1892.



Until 1938 it occupied the home of its founder, ‘Madame’ Vetterli King, who is shown here. Her home was a house called Fosse Bank, next to Blair House in the High Street (now replaced by an office block, 182 High Street). When the school expanded into larger premises on Quarry Hill, it took the name Fosse Bank with it. The extensive photographic archive covers both periods.



An idyllic scene in the school grounds at Fosse Bank in the High Street, captured in an early twentieth century postcard

The Gunpowder Mills excavations

Many readers will be aware of the excellent work being done in clearing and recording the important gunpowder mills site. The site stretches over 1,200 metres along the River Medway between Tonbridge and Leigh. The mills were originally set up in 1811 during the Napoleonic Wars and operated for over 120 years. They were closed in 1934, when all the buildings were razed to the ground.



Chris Rowley explaining the site to visitors in 2008

A three-year investigation of the main site, supported by a Lottery Grant, began in 2006 organised by Chris Rowley and Leigh Historical Society involving local volunteers, including three from our own society, and visiting experts. Over 20 buildings, initially heavily covered in soil and undergrowth, were excavated and examined and the complex waterway system around the site investigated.

An exhibition about the Powder Mills was held in Leigh in 2008. a film documentary produced and finally, in 2009, two books were published. The first, *The Lost Powder Mills of Leigh*, covers the general history of the Powder Mills, and the second, of which THS has a copy, is a detailed site gazetteer looking in detail at each building excavated.

A small group, including the THS members, is still working on the site on buildings whose excavation is still incomplete. Most of the site is owned by GlaxoSmithKline who gave permission for Leigh Historical Society to work on the powder mills site to the south of the Mill Stream, away from the GSK complex. Sadly the site remains private and is not accessible to the general public at present. GSK may be leaving the site soon, so this may change.

THS 50th Anniversary Photo Project

Our Photo Project received good coverage in the *Courier* recently. Contributions are coming in but we still need more. Photographs can record any aspect of Tonbridge life in 2009 or 2010 and will be preserved in the Society's permanent archive.

Now that the days are lengthening do please go out with your camera and photograph anything you think will be of interest to future generations of

Tonbridge people. Bring your photos to any meeting of the Society, or post them to THS Photo Project, 8 Woodview Crescent, Hildenborough, Tonbridge TN11 9HD,

Don't forget to include information such as date taken, location, name of photographer, and who or what is shown.

Closing date: 15th April 2010.

100 years ago – from the Tonbridge Free Press

'A Plucky Act'

7th January 1910: Last Monday evening a horse and cart belonging to Mr Barkway (butcher) bolted from Vale Road up the High Street and outside Mr Bentall's (outfitters) knocked over



The Bull (right) was a former coaching inn in the High Street, where Peacocks is today.

and smashed a traveller's truck and continued up the High Street, and then near the Bull Inn the proprietor (Mr A C Wilson) pluckily scrambled

onto the cart and then onto the horse's back, succeeding in stopping the horse just before the Great Bridge.

'Record victory in the General Election'

21st January 1910 : Tonbridge reverted to its old love, conservatism, and by a majority which was astounding. Out of an electorate of 17,116 no less than 15,337 went to the poll. The result was known a few minutes before midday and an immense crowd wended into the Castle grounds, with almost everyone wearing party colours, to hear the High Sheriff (Colonel Stanley Williams) declare the results from the balcony over the entrance to the Castle.

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|-----------------------------|-------|
| Captain Spender Clay (Con.) | 9,240 |
| Mr A Pagett Hedges (Lib.) | 6,030 |
| Majority | 3,210 |

[The Declaration was photographed and issued as a postcard, shown below]



Here and there

Iron Age settlement: The remains of a probable Iron Age settlement have been unearthed by archaeologists working along the route of a water pipeline being laid near Pembury. Evidence of a dwelling, postholes, pits, ancient hearths and pieces of pottery have been found. The site is on private land and its location has not been revealed.

Tyger's Head: one of Tonbridge's oldest houses has recently changed hands. No. 1 Church Lane, known as Tyger's Head, had been in the Bonner family for several generations. The Grade 2 listed house is thought to date from about 1470.



Tonbridge in 1896: Recent additions to the Society's website include two extracts from a guide to Tonbridge written in 1896. One describes a walk round the town at that date, and the other is a chapter about 'Hops and Hopping': www.tonbridgehistory.org.uk.

Burgess Hill Farm: If the A21 dual-lane goes ahead, a timber-framed 17th century farmhouse will have to be demolished. Burgess Hill Farm lies hidden by trees on the left (north) side of the existing A21 near the top of Castle Hill. The new road has to go on this side of the existing one – on the other side it would cut into the iron age hillforts on Castle Hill. A Historic Building Report on the farm by AOC Archaeology can be seen in Tonbridge Reference Library.

Town Walks: Two walk guides about different aspects of Tonbridge history were published in 2009. *Historic Tonbridge* provides two walks covering North and South Tonbridge. Copies were made available to members at the first Autumn meeting but can also be picked up from the new Gateway Centre in the Castle.

The second leaflet is a circular walk looking at *Jane Austen's connections with Tonbridge* and is available free from the Library in Avebury Avenue.

From the archives – chemist's label



(A squill is a sort of onion. The medicine was used as an expectorant and diuretic.)