



Tonbridge History Autumn 2011

TONBRIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Photo above: Tonbridge awash – again! The flooded interior of the Baptist Church on 19th November 1911 – see page 7. The church stood in the High Street, where the Co-op supermarket is today. The photo was taken by Allwork Brothers, one of the few Tonbridge businesses still active a century later. (THS Pictorial Collection 17.011)

From the Chairman:

The publication of the Autumn Newsletter gives me an opportunity to welcome new members to the Tonbridge Historical Society. It is a great pleasure that attendance at our lectures is rising steadily and many people who first come as visitors choose to join the Society. The first draw, I'm sure, is the excellence of our programme, but I think most of our longstanding members would agree that the warmth and convenience of the Angel Centre is a large contributory factor.

Shiela Broomfield has been able to book some very fine speakers and the 2011-12 programme is full of interest. I look forward to seeing you all on 8th September for Pat Mortlock's new talk on the ladies of the Tudor court.

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 – George Buswell

Secretary – Madge Woods,
56 Derwent Road, Tonbridge, TN10 3HU

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

Minutes & Archives – Sally Robbins

*Pictorial Records Collection and Kent
History Federation Liaison*

– Pat Hopcroft

Publicity & Website – Anthony Wilson

Refreshments organiser – vacant

Other Committee Members:

Deborah Cole

Gill Cowlard

Vanessa King

website: www.tonbridgehistory.org.uk

Subscription: £7 per person (£3.00 for
under-18s), due on 1st March annually
for the following season.

Non-members are welcome as guests
at all meetings on payment of £2 at the
door (£1 for under-18s).

A thankyou from our former Secretary:

I am taking this opportunity to thank you all for the totally unexpected and generous cheque that you presented to me after my standing down from being Secretary of THS for sixteen years. I enjoyed using the money to buy the new book on Medieval Kent and also a pair of earrings and matching pendant. These I purchased from the local jewellers, John Angell – I felt that it was appropriate to give the business to a long-established local firm.

Chris joins me in thanking you also for the bottles of wine which we thoroughly enjoyed.

Shiela Broomfield

... and an introduction for her successor:

Madge Woods, who took over as Secretary at the last AGM, has lived in Tonbridge almost all her life from the age of five. Her main interests are the history, buildings and landscape of Kent and Tonbridge together with collecting postcards, crested china and books relating to the town. Family history is another great interest and she particularly enjoys all the research and visits this entails.

She is a longstanding member of the Society's Pictorial Records Group and has been a Committee Member since 2009.

Lecture Programme 2011-12

All meetings are in the Riverside Room at the Angel Centre.

Thursday 8th September, 7.45 pm

The Kings' Supporters – Ladies of the early Tudor period.

Our first speaker, Pat Mortlock, needs no introduction as she is well known to most and always gives interesting and thought-provoking talks. The Kings' Supporters are the mothers and wives of Henry VII and Henry VIII – from Lady Margaret Beaufort to Catherine Parr – and the talk will consider the impact of their support for the Tudor monarchy at some of its most vulnerable times.

Thursday 13th October, 7.45 pm

A City of Legends – a history of Benghazi, Libya

The speaker, Paul Bennett, is Director of Canterbury Archaeological Trust, but has been working intermittently in Libya since 1972. He is former Chairman of the Society for Libyan Studies (the UK Archaeological and Academic Mission to Libya) and is presently Head of Mission. From 2000-2008 he co-directed excavation at Euesperides, the first (Greek) city on the site of present-day Benghazi.

Saturday 12th November, 2.30 pm

(Two-session meeting with tea. Booking required: form enclosed with this Newsletter)

In the first of two related talks, **Women Wartime Workers in the Munitions Industry**, we will hear how many young women, directed to work during the Second World War, were sent to the munitions factories. This will be followed after tea by **The Bevin**

Boys, describing the fate awaiting the young men who were directed to the mines during the same war and were sent down the pits. The speaker is the historian Dr Ann Kneif, who comes highly recommended. We are fortunate she is free to come to us and give these two talks which complement each other and should provide an interesting afternoon.

Thursday 8th December, 7.45 pm

Behind the Scenes at 'Time Team'

The title speaks for itself. The speaker, Raksha Dave, has been a member of the 'Time Team' on Channel 4 television since 2004, following a few years' experience with the Museum of London Archaeological Service. In true archaeological fashion she was urged to apply to 'Time Team' when in a pub! She promises to give us a fascinating insight into this popular series. This is a view of archaeology that will be unfamiliar to many of us.

Thursday 2nd February 2012, 7.45 pm

How They Built the Crystal Palace in Four Months Flat

After the Christmas and New Year break we welcome our second home-grown speaker, Anthony Wilson. Construction of the iconic Crystal Palace to house the Great Exhibition of 1851 was an extraordinary feat of logistics and engineering, even by Victorian standards, and achieved in record time. The illustrated talk will show how it was done.

Thursday 8th March 2012

Cast-iron Firebacks

The speaker, Jeremy Hodgkinson, has recently written the first survey

of British firebacks, describing their development and variety and providing interpretation, where possible, of the decoration to be found on them. He is the President of the Wealden Iron Research Group and author of 'The Wealden Iron Industry' (2008).

Thursday 19th April 2012, 7.30 pm

AGM, followed by '**All the Rage**', A light-hearted look by Lee Ault at the fashions, accessories and social attitudes of the 1920s and 30s, two hectic decades between the world wars, illustrated by original clothes of the period. Lee Ault is a costume historian and freelance writer as well as being curator of the Dickens House Museum in Broadstairs.

Recent Meetings

In March Katy Chaney, site librarian at Broomhill, told the story of the Salomons family and Broomhill, the country house near Tunbridge Wells

which they built in the 1830s and which is now a museum and part of Canterbury Christ Church University. David Salomons became an M.P., the first Jew to speak in Parliament and the first Jewish Lord Mayor of London. His nephew, Sir David Lionel was a scientist and engineer. He had England's largest private workshop at Broomhill (with 60,000 tools) and owned the second motor car in England which he drove back from Paris after a 30 minute driving lesson.

Following the AGM on 7th April, Paul Cuming gave a wide-ranging talk about the work of the ten-strong KCC Heritage Conservation team, based in Maidstone, whose main responsibility is the conservation of the archaeological sites and historic landscapes of the county. They also maintain the Kent Historic Environment Record, a database of archaeological discoveries and historic buildings, now available online.

Tonbridge support for the Wyatt Rebellion of January 1554

It is well known that the rebellion of 1554 was ostensibly concerned with opposition to the impending marriage of Queen Mary with a foreign ruler, Philip II of Spain. It also expressed popular dislike of the return of Roman Catholicism after the Protestant reforms under Edward VI. The rebels came especially from around Maidstone and south-west Kent.

That Tonbridge was deeply implicated is seen by the fact that two gentry, Thomas Fane of Tonbridge and Henry Fane of Tonbridge and Hadlow, who both owned extensive estates in the area, were rebels. Among those

from the town were Thomas Blundell, mercer, and Thomas Plane, innkeeper, both tenants of Thomas Fane. The tenants of the four parks or forests round the town, Sir George Harper and Thomas Culpepper, had sub-let to the ironmaster, Davy Willard, another rebel. Harper was tenant for life of part of Henry Fane's estate. The rebels were tied financially and were presumably all known to each other. Yet not all of the leading Tonbridge people favoured the revolt; John Proctor, first headmaster of Tonbridge School, was Roman Catholic in sympathy and opposed it strongly. – *Christopher Chalklin*

The Wellers of Chauntlers: new light on a Tonbridge family

I am oblig'd to you to remind me of the Damps spoyling my Wardrobe at Boardike . . .'

– Sarah Weller to Edward Weller, from Bath, 8 Feb 1724

'My Nephew Geo. Austen shows arway before the Skinners I understand, they praise the boy to much as indeed they did my Nephew Harry, it gives them a wrong turn of mind & makes them ridiculouls conceited . . .'

– Stephen Austen to Edward Weller, from London, 25 May 1745

The Weller family's former home, Chauntlers, still stands in Bordyke, Tonbridge. They are known for Thomas Weller's account of skirmishes in the English Civil War, when he attempted to defend the house, together with the parliamentary funds he had collected, from royalist attack; and also for the fact that his grand-daughter, Elizabeth Weller, was Jane Austen's great-grandmother. Elizabeth is admired for her resourcefulness in enabling her family to recover from the sudden death and debts of her husband, John Austen of Broadford, Horsmonden, by taking employment as housekeeper to the bachelor headmaster of Sevenoaks School, thereby educating her younger sons free of charge.

Thomas had purchased Chauntlers about 1631, and it remained in the

family until it was sold to a neighbour and relative, George Children of Ferox Hall, in 1800. It was then divided into two properties, now called The Priory and The Red House.

The Wellers were primarily a family of lawyers, with long-standing ties of service to the Nevills, several generations of Wellers acting as stewards of their estates at Eridge and Birling. But Elizabeth's brother Robert, a younger son, trained as an apothecary and moved to Rochester. In 1704 he made a successful marriage to Elizabeth Poley of Rochester, where he was mayor in 1719, and in 1728 he acted as High Sheriff of Kent. When his father died aged ninety, having outlived his two eldest sons, it was Robert who acquired Chauntlers. His daughter Jane, who married John Children of Ramhurst, Leigh, was George Children's mother. Then in 1754 the Poley estate at Boxted, Suffolk, was settled on Robert's barrister son George, on condition that he assumed the Poley name. George moved to Boxted Hall in 1757 and his Weller-Poley descendants remain there to this day.

One of the very first donations of estate and family papers received by the new Kent Archives Office at Maidstone, in August 1939, was from the grandfather of the present owner of Boxted (catalogue reference U38).



Chauntlers as it is today

These mostly pre-date the family's migration to Suffolk and contain information not only for Tonbridge but also for the early history of the fashionable new spa resort of the Wells. Later the personal correspondence of Elizabeth and Robert Weller's brother Edward, mayor of Faversham, arrived from another source (U1000/18). This deserves to be better-known: like the correspondence of the Woodgates, it evokes the gentry of Tonbridge and its neighbourhood, but at an earlier date. Intimate, candid, full of vitality and gossip, the letters also have a special interest in the glimpses which they provide of Edward Weller's Austen relatives (such as the extract given above, concerning Jane Austen's father, George, at Tonbridge School).

The Weller-Poley family deposited further records at the Bury St Edmunds branch of the Suffolk Record Office (HA 519), but the fact that these too contained material for Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells has been known

to few. Now the Centre for Kentish Studies has acquired copies of the Kent material, courtesy of Suffolk RO (CKS reference TR 3882). Some documents expand our knowledge of the family's employment, army commissions and connections, explaining references in the letters. There is one book containing letters from Robert Weller from almost his entire career, and another of family memoranda. The deeds include the marriage settlement of John Children and Jane Weller; several leases of the regicide John Bradshawe, owner of Somerhill during the Commonwealth, of the Priory lands (now Tonbridge Recreation Ground), with interesting stipulations; and a conveyance to trustees, from the profligate Viscountess Purbeck, of the newly-built chapel at Tunbridge Wells dedicated to King Charles the Martyr. – *Mark Ballard, Centre for Kentish Studies*

[Thomas Weller's account of Civil War events in Tonbridge can be read on the THS website: www.tonbridgehistory.org.uk/events/civil-war.html]

Three farms on the outskirts of Tonbridge

I am researching the history of three farms which have now largely vanished under Lodge Oak Lane and its neighbouring roads, the Priory Mill site and the industrial estate – Lodge Oak farm, Walter's farm and Brook farm. They were originally owned by different



Lodge Oak farm house, now the Cardinal's Error pub in Lodge Oak Lane

families but in the early years of the nineteenth century they were acquired by William Woodgate of Somerhill. In 1816 the farms were leased to John Bruce Allen who appears to have farmed them as a single entity. This reflected a contemporary

trend to merge smaller farms into larger and more productive units. By the early 1840s the tenancy had passed to John Milles and the Tithe Annuity map and Award shows the total acreage as 148 acres made up of arable and pasture land, meadows, orchards, woods and hop gardens.

The farm house of Lodge Oak survives and today it is the Cardinal's Error pub in Lodge Oak Lane. The farm house for Walter's farm stood on what is now the Royal Mail Depot in Vale Rise but the only remaining trace today of the farm is in the name of Walters Farm Road on the industrial estate.

There is a great deal of information available about the historic heart of Tonbridge but much less about the various farms that disappeared under the streets of Tonbridge in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

I would be interested to know if any THS members remember these farms before their redevelopment last century.

– *Maureen McLeod*

100 years ago

From the Tonbridge Free Press

There had been 24 hours of almost continuous rain and about two inches had fallen in that time.

24th November 1911

‘The severest floods experienced in Tonbridge since 1900 invaded the town on Saturday night (18th November) causing considerable alarm and consternation ... in a very short time the High Street and the immediate

vicinity was practically surrounded and eventually water rushed into the main street with disastrous results ... A foot and a half of water rushed through the premises of Mr Frank East and The Bull Hotel was at one time quite inaccessible. ... A bird's eye view of the town on Sunday morning would have shown the east and west sides to be one great stretch of water with the High Street still covered ... Worshippers at the Baptist Church found the doors closed against them explained by a notice saying "No Service owing to floods".’

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Here and there

New History Courses in Tonbridge

WEA Courses

At the Adult Education Centre, Avebury Avenue:

Famous Women in Kent: 7 sessions from 17th Oct., 2–4

Art of Byzantium: 5 sessions from 9th Jan. 2012, 10–12

History of China: 10 sessions from 11th Jan. 2012, 2–4

At Tonbridge Bowling Club, off Darenth Avenue, Tonbridge Farm Sports-ground:

Exploring Medieval, Tudor and Stuart Landscapes and Buildings: 10 sessions from 4th Oct., 10.15–12.15

Industrial Architecture: 5 sessions from 10th Jan. 2012, 10–12

Legacy of the Stuarts: 5 sessions from 21st Feb. 2012, 10–12

Full details about all WEA courses available from Tonbridge Library or Jill Britcher

Kent Adult Education Courses

At the AEC, Avebury Avenue. Brochure from the Library and the AEC.

Family History: 10 sessions from 11th Jan 2012, 7.30–9.30pm

Your Weald - Kent: 8 sessions from 27th Sept. 2011, 7.30–9.30pm

Five Session Evening Courses, 7.30–9.30:

Time Traveller's Guide to English History, from 21/9/11; *Racy Romans*, from 2/11/11; *Smashing Saxons*, from 11/1/12;

Nasty Normans, from 22/2/12.

One Day Saturday Courses, 10–3:

Domesday Kent, 15/10/11; *Medieval Kent*, 5/11/11; *Elizabethan Kent*, 14/1/12; *Roman Kent*, 3/3/12.



Still in limbo: No.1 Bank Street, seen here from the High Street, remains a sorry sight. The Victorian house was once the premises of the auctioneer Arthur H. Neve, whose son of the same name, described as a 'Tonbridge Worthy', was the author of the very readable history of the town, published as 'The Tonbridge of Yesterday' by the Tonbridge Free Press in 1933.

Permission to convert Nos 1 and 3 Bank Street into bed-sits was granted, but permission to demolish the two properties has been refused, and this decision is currently subject to appeal.