

# Tonbridge History

Autumn 2013

*Photo above: Two of the aquatic games at one of the annual Water Galas staged by Tonbridge Swimming Club before the First World War – see page 7. Tonbridge's municipal swimming bath had opened in 1910, though it was 1919 before the local Council, in the teeth of fierce opposition, allowed 'mixed bathing' – men and women in the water together.*

## From the Chairman:

Having taken over as Chairman from Jenny Poxon I would like to thank her for all her hard work and enthusiasm during her term as Chairman, and I hope that the Society continues developing and progressing into the future. A little background about myself: I worked for over 30 years teaching history in grammar schools in South Manchester and moved to Tonbridge with my wife seven years ago. One of the first organisations we joined was the Historical Society and we have both enjoyed being members. I am interested in all aspects of history, particularly local and industrial.

*George Buswell*

## Society News

### Tonbridge Historical Society

Founded: 1960

*President* – Joy Debney

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

#### Committee

*Chairman* – George Buswell

*Vice Chairman and Website*  
– Anthony Wilson

*Secretary* – Madge Woods,

*Treasurer* – Pat Mortlock,

*Minutes & Archives* – Sally Robbins

*Publicity* – Vanessa King

*Audio-visual Officer* – Deborah Cole

*Social Events* – Jenny Poxon

*Other Committee Members:*

Roger Barham

Pam Sharland

*Co-opted Members:*

Shiela Broomfield (*Archaeology*)

Pat Hopcroft (*Pictorial Records Collection and Kent History Federation Liaison*)

*website:* [www.tonbridgehistory.org.uk](http://www.tonbridgehistory.org.uk)

*Subscription (from 2014):* £9 per person (£3.00 for under-18s), due on 1<sup>st</sup> 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).

### Lecture Programme 2013-14

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

*Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> September, 7.45 pm*

#### **The Georgians – polite (and not-so-polite) society in 18<sup>th</sup> century England**

Patsy Erskine-Hill

Our speaker has degrees from Trinity College, Dublin and Edinburgh University. She travels and lectures widely on Russian, Italian and British History to groups including history societies and cruise passengers, but 18<sup>th</sup> century England is a particular enthusiasm.

*Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> October, 7.45 pm*

#### **Kent in the English Civil War, 1640-49**

Jackie Eales

Professor Eales holds the chair of Early Modern History at Canterbury Christ Church University, and is currently President of the Historical Association. She has written and researched extensively on the English Civil Wars, Tudor and Stuart Women, and 17<sup>th</sup> century Puritanism.

*Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> November, 2.30 pm*

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

#### **1 Shakespeare's Playhouses**

#### **2 Theatrical Lives**

Julian Bowsher

The speaker has worked for MOLA (Museum of London Archaeology) since 1986. He is a noted expert in the archaeology and history of

'Shakespearean' theatre in London and author of 'Shakespeare's London theatreland: archaeology, history and drama' (2012).

His first talk will be mainly centred on buildings and the second on artefacts.

*Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> December, 7.45 pm*

### **A History of Comic Verse – 1066 to the internet**

Geoff Hutchinson

Prepare for a lively and entertaining evening when the well-known author and local historian Geoff Hutchinson returns for our Christmas meeting. His previous appearances as Mad Jack Fuller and others have been greatly enjoyed. What he has in store this time we will find out on the night!

*Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> February 2014, 7.45 pm*

### **Vinzenz's Diary – a moving diary of a German POW**

George and Joyce Buswell

Vinzenz Fetzer was a German soldier who was captured in 1944 and then spent nearly three years in a Prisoner of War camp at Tonbridge. The talk, given jointly by our Chairman and his wife, covers how his diary was translated and what it tells us about his experiences as a POW.

*Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> March 2014, 7.45 pm*

### **Gad's Hill Place – Dickens' Little Kentish Freehold**

Ann Carter

Charles Dickens moved into Gad's Hill Place in Higham in 1860 and died there ten years later. Our speaker is a well-known lecturer who formerly taught at the school which until recently occupied Gad's Hill Place.

*Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> April 2014, 7.30 pm*

AGM, followed by

### **The Luttrell Psalter – an illuminated manuscript of the 14<sup>th</sup> century**

Imogen Corrigan

This manuscript is remarkable for its teeming illustrations of mediaeval life and farming, mixed with saints and monsters. The speaker is a freelance lecturer and study-tour guide in Anglo-Saxon and Mediaeval History and Art.

### **Recent Meetings**

At the March 2012 meeting Andrew Richardson spoke about his involvement in the development of policies to tackle the problem of heritage crime – such as illegal excavations and metal detecting, and damage to listed buildings. He finished with the story of catching someone carrying out illegal excavations at Thurnham and then discovering that he had also done over 20 other illegal excavations, mainly in the South East, but as far north as Hardknot Fort in Cumbria and that his illegal 'finds collection' included a section of mosaic pavement from a Roman villa in Gloucestershire.

Following the AGM in April Marc Morris gave an entertaining, informative and well-illustrated talk about the Norman Conquest, linked to his recent book. He showed how William's victory in 1066 fundamentally changed England with the introduction of castles, the rebuilding of every major church, changes to both law and language and the destruction of the Saxon ruling class. The 1086 Domesday Survey showed how radically society had changed, as only 13 of the top 500 tenants were English at that time.

## ... in the footsteps of mediaeval knights

*It is not generally known that Tonbridge had its own long distance circular walk in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Deborah Cole has brought it up to date.*

Details of the mediaeval walk have lain on a single sheet of parchment in Canterbury Cathedral for seven centuries. Unlike 21<sup>st</sup> century walks, this one was not for leisure but was a 'perambulation of the lowy of Tonbridge' (the castle lands) by 24 lords and knights to determine what belonged to the Earl, Gilbert Clare (the Red) and what belonged to the Archbishop of Canterbury and others.

The copy in Canterbury Cathedral is in mediaeval latin and was translated by John Harris in 1719. Hasted, writing 80 years later, refused to include it in his great work on the history of Kent because 'the places as well as the names of persons mentioned in these perambulations being obsolete and now totally unknown, the insertion of them in this place can give so little information to the reader'. Since that time the perambulation route has been largely forgotten apart from WV Dumbreck's referrals to parts of it in the 1958 issue of *Archaeologia Cantiana*.

Not being deterred and knowing that you must never believe all you read, the document has now been revisited, transcribed and translated again. Knowing also that 13<sup>th</sup> century documents do not come thick and fast in Tonbridge we need to make the most of what there is.

Fifty-nine places were visited on that day (or over a period) in 1279. Of these it was discovered that 17 still exist, with a cluster of them in the west and north, between Penshurst and Underriver. This

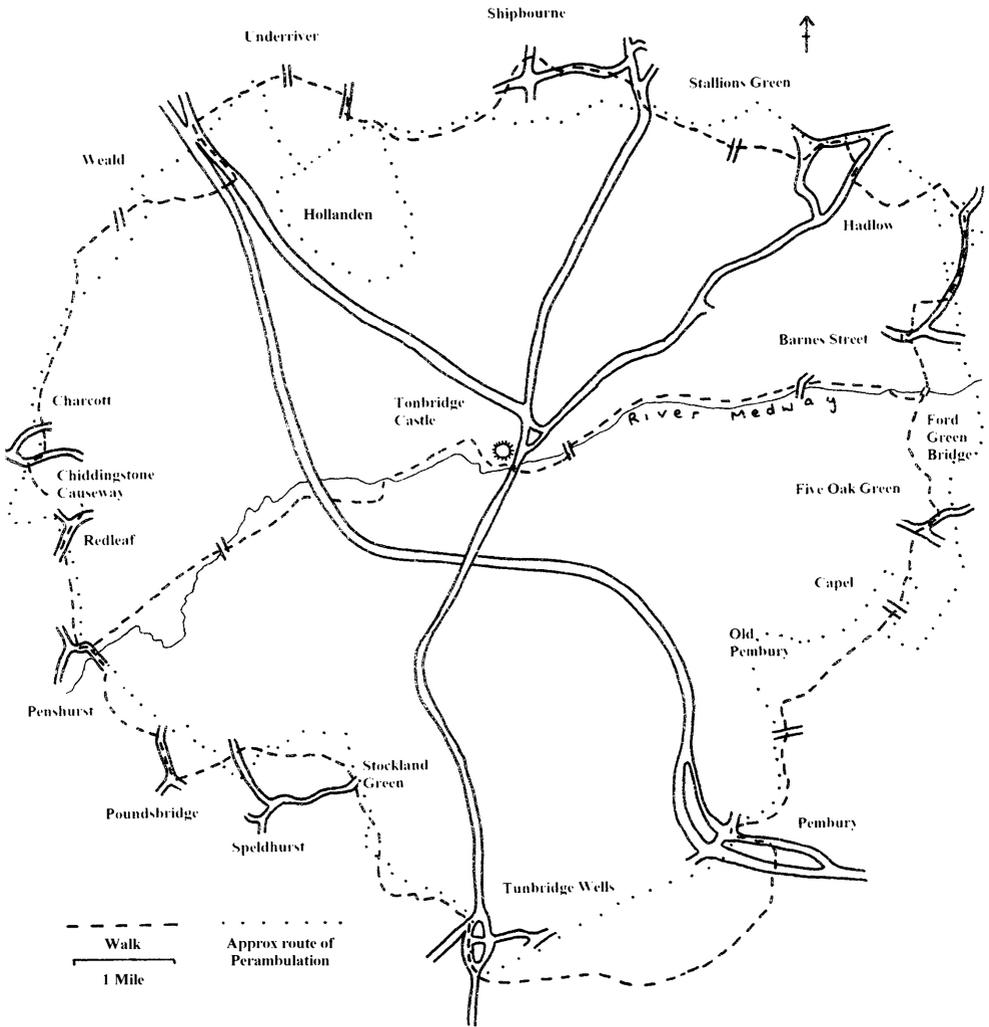
portion reads as follows: '... to the garden of Penestr and so directly to Redelef ... to Coppingsland ... and so directly by the land of the Prior of Tonbridge [Priory Farm] ... and so to the mead of Newsoles [Nizels] ... from the paved way [London Road] ... and so to Romdsbedde ...'

If other places are added which are recorded in other documents or can be identified by their situation in the landscape and on old maps, then 34 of the 59 places can be identified with reasonable confidence which is more than half. The 34 places were joined up on a map and as Dumbreck discovered the jury of Lords and Knights appeared to follow old parish boundaries.



*Part of the walk following a surviving boundary bank*

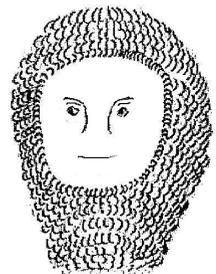
Having drawn a rough map of the route, it was decided to walk it in stages and see if the landscape revealed any clues that might identify missing places such as ponds, old roads, house names etc. Public footpaths were found to lie on or near the route and they were linked up to make a long distance



circular walk of 33 miles.

Many discoveries were made on the walk. Missing places could be identified by associated features and old names seen on houses and roads. That was exciting enough, but to top it all, the countryside around Tonbridge was found to be extremely varied and beautiful and so a book has been written with directions for the long distance walk and for a series of circular walks all with historical notes. The walks are

'led' by Stephen of Penshurst who presided over the perambulation at the castle in 1279 and whose effigy can be seen in Penshurst Church. For details have a look at [www.tonbridgecircularwalk.co.uk](http://www.tonbridgecircularwalk.co.uk)



*Stephen of Penshurst*

## More about the town museum

*Sydney Simmons, former Borough Engineer, sheds a little light on the fate of the contents of the town museum (THS Newsletter, Spring 2013):*

'When I came here in 1951 part of the loft in the castle offices was the Town Clerk's domain and held what I was told were the remains of the Museum. Among the items stored there were some wooden display units with divisions similar to pigeon holes in which were collections of stones (they may have been geological specimens), a stuffed alligator with its jaws open, a large disembowelled clock from the old Town Hall with the mechanism in a loose heap, and a very heavy metal bell. There was also a robust timber 'Baby Walker', possibly Victorian, designed to support a toddler walking in circles round a central pillar.

There were two other sets of Museum items. In the basement of the castle offices, beyond the intact Georgian ovens, were a series of wine bins, in which there were beautiful marble busts. In the roof space above the Surveyor's stores in the nearby Slade depot were large oil paintings similar in quality to The Crucifixion in the Council Chamber.

Later, following Local Government reorganisation in 1974, I was asked to go to the castle

to sort out all the documents from the Clerk's domain in the roof. But when we got there the floor was swept bare and the only document was the drawing of a sewage pumping station not in Tonbridge. I was told all the Town Clerk's documents had been thrown out of the windows into a skip. The marble busts disappeared and the new TMDC officers claimed they had never existed.

I understood that the items of real interest and value in the collection had been the remnants of The Kibble bequest to the Tonbridge Mechanics Institute.'

*Anne Hughes expands on this:* 'Thomas Kibble of Greentrees, Hadlow Road, gave many pictures, statuary, works of art and books to the Tonbridge Mechanics' Institute, later transferred to the Library, but no record of these



*Marble busts in the castle basement, now lost. Council officials claimed they never existed.*

can be found. The only item I have traced is a painting said to be by Tintoretto which is in the council chamber of Tonbridge Castle, but there is no mention of the donor. According to the *Tonbridge Free Press* the items were saved from a fire at Greentrees in 1879.'

## 100 years ago – from the Tonbridge Free Press

### 29th August 1913: The Water Gala

‘Some delightful weather favoured the Water Gala held in the Bath on Wednesday, and arranged by the Tonbridge Swimming Club. The excellent character of the programme provided called for much favourable comment, and the numerous events were keenly contested.

At the conclusion of the programme, and prior to the distribution of the prizes by Lady Nott Bower, a pleasing little ceremony was performed by that lady which took the form of the presentation of a framed illuminated address, silver and oak inkstand and silver pen to the Hon. Secretary, Mr Roger Leonard who has in that capacity worked so enthusiastically and with such success to promote the welfare of the club. Mr E. Sanderson said but for Mr Leonard there would have been no Tonbridge Swimming Club as he had been the pioneer of it, but he expressed his regret that Mr Leonard had not been successful in his attempt to form a Ladies section of the club but he (Mr Sanderson) believed it only needed ladies to come forward and support the scheme.’ (*The photos on page 1 of this Newsletter may have been taken at this event.*)

### 10th October 1913: Shopping Week and the Carnival

*A century before the recent ‘Tonbridge Taster Day’ the town held a ‘Shopping Week’:*

‘This week Tonbridge is experiencing its first Shopping Week and so far the event has proved highly successful. Despite the wretched weather conditions which prevailed on Tuesday and Wednesday large numbers of people have been attracted into the town. The Shop Window displays have been ‘the feature of the week’ but the Carnival on Wednesday evening also drew a large crowd into the High Street. The intermittent rain had caused many forebodings but fortunately the Clerk of the weather became more kindly disposed as the hour approached for the start of the procession ...

There were upwards of seventy entries and prizes were awarded in four sections: decorated bicycle or hand vehicle, fancy costume, decorated cars and decorated horses or vehicles (although only horses entered in this section). A start was made from the Fire Station [then near the Castle] and the route included the High Street, Pembury Road ... and return to the Fire Station where prizes were distributed.’

## Mediaeval Menu

Archaeologists working on the former Bingo Hall site in the High Street in 2003-5 found food remains in abundance. They included bones of ox, pig, and sheep or goats (but not horse), and there was evidence of butchery in the splitting of bones to extract the marrow. Bones from sea fish such as

cod, herring, eel and haddock were also found. For fruit, there is evidence that mediaeval Tonbridge people were getting their five a day from plums, grapes, elderberries and raspberries or gooseberries. Oats made up most of the cereal intake, supplemented with wheat and barley.

## Here and there ....

### One-day Conference

*Landscapes of south-east England during the Roman period:* Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> November 2013 in Faversham, organised by Kent Archaeological Field School and the Council for British Archaeology South East. For details and to book, go to [www.kafs.co.uk](http://www.kafs.co.uk) and click on 'News'.

### Hope House and the YWCA

Platform 51 in Lyons Crescent (formerly the YWCA) is researching the history of Hope House, built in 1911 as a hostel for young ladies working away from home. The founders were local philanthropists: Emmeline Snelling, Marion McGill, Harriet Streeten and Lucy Deacon.

In later years the building has been used by the Brownies, the Geraldine Fox School of Dancing, a nursery and other activities (see [www.platform51.org](http://www.platform51.org)). Can you help them with any local historical knowledge on the founders or YWCA branch, please? In addition, they would love to hear from anyone who has memories of using Hope House.

Contact: Deborah Petrick: History Project, Platform 51, Hope House, 7 Lyons Crescent, Tonbridge, TN9 1EX.

### Romany and Traveller FHS

The Romany and Traveller Family History Society will be holding an

Open Day on Saturday October 19<sup>th</sup> from 11am to 4pm at the Old School Hall, Hadlow. It is hoped that a new memorial plaque in St Mary's churchyard to the 30 Romany and Irish hop-pickers who died in the accident at Hartlake Bridge in 1853 will be dedicated during the afternoon. Enquiries to Anne Hughes, 01732 850214.

### Forthcoming history courses

#### WEA Courses in Tonbridge

*Exploring Britain's Historic Landscapes, Settlements and Buildings:* 10 weeks from 1<sup>st</sup> October 2013, 10.15 - 12.15

*The Philosophy of History:* 20 weeks from 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2013, 10 - 12

*Art in Tuscany: The Emerging Renaissance:* 10 weeks from 10<sup>th</sup> November 2013, 10 - 12

*Ten British Prime Ministers:* 10 weeks from 9<sup>th</sup> January 2014, 2 - 4

*The River Thames (part 2):* 5 weeks from 14<sup>th</sup> January 2014, 10 - 12

*Five Great Buildings:* 5 weeks from 25<sup>th</sup> February, 10 - 12

Day school: *The Origins of Kentish People:* 6<sup>th</sup> November 2013, 2 - 4.30

(For details of all WEA courses contact Rosemary Walker, 01732 366346)

#### Kent Adult Education courses

Not available when going to press but check at the Adult Education Centre, Avebury Avenue.

THS Newsletter is compiled by George Buswell and Anthony Wilson. Our thanks to all contributors. Future contributions should be sent to THS, 7 The Ridgeway, Tonbridge TN10 4NQ Deadline for the next issue: 1st Feb. 2014