

Tonbridge History Autumn 2018



After the great 1968 flood came the great clear-up: part of the mountain of sodden paper goods outside the Whitefriars Press works in Medway Wharf Road (See page 5)

TONBRIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Society News

Tonbridge Historical Society

Founded: 1960

President – Patricia Mortlock

Past President – Christopher Chalklin

Committee

Acting Chairman & Archives

– George Buswell

Vice-Chairman & Audio-visual Officer

– Deborah Cole

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

Treasurer & Programme – Pam Boorman,
156 Vale Road, Tonbridge TN9 1SP

Minutes – Pam Sharland

Website & Publications

– Anthony Wilson

Shiela Broomfield (*Archaeology*)

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

Sally Robbins

Robert Greenhill

David Phillips

Subscription: £9 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 £3 at the door (under-18s free).

From the Acting Chairman

As I write this towards the end of July we are still enjoying a long spell of hot, dry and sunny weather but I am sure by September we will be ready to enjoy our 2018/19 programme. Our programme secretary (now also treasurer) Pam Boorman has organized an interesting and varied series of talks - over half come from suggestions by members so keep the ideas coming.

I must thank our previous treasurer, Pat Mortlock, for her ten year stint keeping the society's accounts in order. I am very pleased that she has agreed to become President of our Society so that her knowledge and experience is still available to us.

George Buswell

Recent Meetings

In March Alex Ferris, who is Chairman of Smarden Local History Society, talked about how plague came to Smarden in the late C17th. The talk was based on research into a 1671 document written by the Vicar of Smarden which recorded that at least 50 villagers had died in an eight week period and been buried in unconsecrated ground. One of the dead was the wife of the village doctor – Matthew Hartnup – and Dr Hartnup was involved in trying to cope with the outbreak. He died in 1679 and his house still stands in Smarden with a beam on the front of the house with the year 1671 on it.

In April the situation dreaded by any programme organizer happened when, on the day of the talk (and AGM), it

was discovered that the speaker Geoff Vines was ill and could not give his talk on the Armistice. At short notice George Buswell stepped in and spoke about 'Tonbridge, Turnpikes and Transport'.

He looked at Tonbridge's involvement in the development of road transport in the C18th and early C19th. The first Turnpike Act in Kent was passed in 1709 for a road from Sevenoaks through Tonbridge to Tunbridge Wells. Tonbridge eventually had 3 tollgates – all now marked by small plaques – on the Shipbourne Road near the Royal Oak pub, at Mill Lane at the end of the Bordyke and outside the Library at the south end of the High Street. As coach travel developed Tonbridge became a transport hub and by the early C19th over 30 coaches a day were passing through the town, with the Rose & Crown as the main coaching inn.

There was even a brief attempt in the 1830s to run steam coaches on the Tonbridge turnpikes.

Lecture Programme 2018-19

All meetings are held in the Riverside Room at the Angel Centre. Tea and coffee are available before the evening meetings.

Thursday 20th September, 7.45 pm

Putting 1066 and William the Conqueror in perspective

David Bates

The speaker is a distinguished former Professor of Medieval History at the University of East Anglia, specializing in the history of Britain and France in the 10th to 13th centuries. His recent books include a life of William the

Conqueror in the 'English Monarchs' series, in which he proposes a radical revision of the Conqueror's life, and '1066 in perspective' published with the Royal Armouries. This illustrated talk comes highly recommended by one of our members.

Thursday 11th October, 7.45 pm

Tonbridge in World War I

Pam Mills

The speaker is a Youth Liaison officer for the Royal British Legion, and well-known locally as organiser and promoter of Remembrance events. She has researched in depth all aspects of Tonbridge town and its people in the 1914-18 war, and recently developed, with Dave Swarbrick, a WWI Tonbridge Town Walk.

Saturday 10th November, 2.30 pm

Booking is essential for this meeting – a form with details of charges is available from the Secretary

Two talks by Robert Stephenson

Another recommendation from one of our members, Robert Stephenson is a qualified City of London Culture & Heritage Guide. He is also a trustee at Kensal Green and Brompton cemeteries. He teaches about London and 'death studies' and is chairman of the National Federation of Cemetery Friends.

1 The Knights Templar & their London connections

Starting as humble warrior-monks protecting pilgrims in the Holy Land, the Knights Templar developed a global support network and became rich and powerful. The talk looks at London sites connected with their headquarters and their brutal suppression.

2 London's Traditional Customs & Ceremonies

In his second talk the speaker will give an overview of the capital's many fascinating customs and observances. It celebrates the persistence of ostensibly nonsensical rituals over hundreds of years.

Thursday 20th December, 7.45 pm

Behind the scenes in the Golden Years of television

Wilf Lower

The speaker spent his early life surrounded by music hall and variety performers as the family home provided 'digs' for 'pros' appearing at local theatres. He went on to work at the BBC where he was responsible for Scenic Operations: the scenery, props, 'working' the shows, essentially everything seen on the screen except the performers, their costumes and make-up! He will be talking about characters, situations and other events from the period of Morecambe and Wise, The Forsyte Saga, When the Boat comes in, The Good Life, Top of the Pops, Last Night of the Proms and many others.

Thursday 14th February 2019, 7.45 pm

Old Kent Windmills

Andrew Wood

The talk will feature some fine old mills that have long since disappeared from the Kentish landscape, plus a few preserved mills – mills at Hildenborough and Bidborough are included. It will incorporate an audio-visual presentation tailored to our area of the county and include some drone photography. Mr Wood is an experienced speaker to local societies and is based in Ashford.

Thursday 14th March 2019, 7.45 pm

A Schoolgirl's War

Mary Smith

The speaker is a former Headmistress of Maidstone Girls' Grammar School, and author of the recently-published book 'A Schoolgirl's War: the Story of a Kent School in World War Two'. It features an exquisite, probably unique, and previously unpublished set of paintings of school life during the Battle of Britain and the doodlebug attacks. The paintings were completed by the school's art teacher, Helen Keen, as the war unfolded. Also included are fascinating and often surprising recollections of past pupils, now in their 80s and 90s.

Thursday April 11th 2019, 7.30 pm

AGM, followed by

The Domesday Knights of Canterbury

Vanessa King

The speaker is a medieval historian teaching for the University of London and a former Committee Member of THS. She has published articles on aspects of Domesday Book, and recently on the Black Death. Her talk will focus on the landholdings of the Archbishop of Canterbury's knights in 1086.



How the Tonbridge floods were reported in The Times, 18-19 September 1968

The swirl of deep, filthy water flooded into hundreds of buildings around Tonbridge yesterday. It collected the mess from drains and sewers, the oil from submerged cars, and the mud and debris from swamped gardens—and smeared it on the walls and floors of neat, commuter-belt homes.

The water on one estate at Hildenborough was over 6ft. deep in places. People living in bungalows watched helplessly as their homes and belongings were engulfed. Other families, with upstairs rooms, spent hours moving furniture into bedrooms.

Neighbourliness reached war-time heights. People outside the flooded areas provided meals and hot drinks for the less fortunate. Men who normally brush shoulders in rush hour trains suddenly became friends.

A man sailed past a bedroom window in an inflatable paddling pool, handing out coffee to trapped families. "How much?" asked one customer. "It is free. I am your neighbour. I live just round the corner", came the reply.

An old woman, chest high in water in her bungalow, was rescued holding her cat.

Shops and commercial property, rather than manufacturing industry, were the hardest hit. Hardest of all was Tesco, which had 10 shops out of order. The group's Tonbridge store was "a write-off". Its £100,000-worth of stock was a total loss, while even the shop's foundations were suspect, as water poured through ground-floor windows.

In Tonbridge first estimates of stock losses by shopkeepers in the High Street were £250,000. The urban council buried debris, which included 2,000 carcasses of cattle, sheep and poultry which had been washed into the town. About 500 properties in the town were damaged.

At Tonbridge the floods subsided, leaving an evil-smelling film over everything. Bungalows were worst affected with carpets, soaking wet and shrunken, furniture misshapen, curtains and clothing ruined. Cookers, washing machines, refrigerators, which days ago were smartly functional, stood useless in the gardens.

Beds and three-piece suites, sideboards, and huge piles of books were carried out to dry on lawns where grass showed thinly through the mud.

Looting danger as floods recede

BY STAFF REPORTERS

As the flood waters receded from south-east England and East Anglia last night guards were keeping watch in towns affected by the floods to prevent the looting of abandoned shops.

Army searchlights and police patrols guarded the flooded shopping area at Molesey, Surrey, and pickets were posted at both ends of the High Street in Tonbridge, Kent.

Medical authorities in Tonbridge issued a warning about the danger of scavenging food that may have been contaminated by flood water.

100 years ago

Armistice Day in Tonbridge

From the Courier 15th November 1918

'GERMANY'S SURRENDER'

'Rejoicings at Tonbridge'

The receipt of the great news that war had ended seemed for the time being to stagger the people of Tonbridge. It seemed impossible to realise the truth of the glorious message that the terrible bloodshed had ended, and ended in triumph for England and her noble allies. As the minutes rolled by however there came a sudden awakening and the streets were soon ringing with the cheers of a delighted people. Scarcely a soul remained indoors and the High Street was quickly thronged with excited crowds. Flags and bunting seem to spring from nowhere, everyone sported a favour and the shops which had the decorations for disposal did a remarkable trade, and during the first hour experienced an exceptionally busy time. In many instances there was such overwhelming joy that the people fraternised wildly and soldiers and civilians embraced.

The mother town has ever been known to rise to the occasion and steps were at once taken to arrange a procession, which was formed at 2.30 at St. Stephen's Green and headed by a drum and fife band proceeded along the High Street and the other principal thoroughfares, followed by a huge crowd....

Councillor Donald Clark, in addressing the crowd, said 'at this supreme moment of the country's history we had met to give thanks to the Giver of all victory, for this victory

of right over might. The war had been a terrible struggle of opposing forces, one side for justice, freedom and righteousness, the other for brute force. The result had been the confirmation of the truth that no amount of physical force could ultimately prevail against right. Four years and four months ago we took up the challenge thrown down against the freedom of the world and staked everything we held dear. It was the greatest act in the history of our race and we made the most sublime sacrifices in the history of the world. ... We were thinking of infinite sacrifices we had made of our bravest and best to save the basic principles of civilization, and we could truly say with Kipling

*If blood be the price of civilization
my god we have paid it in full.*

Mr C Lowry [Headmaster of Tonbridge School] followed with a few apposite remarks. 'You all know', he said, 'that this is the greatest day in the history of the world. After four years of agony and apprehension Europe and the world can breathe again. It is the rebirth of the world - of Russia, Belgium, Serbia, Poland, and last of all of Germany; and to these rebirths our countrymen and brothers over the sea have contributed. This town of Tonbridge had contributed a fair share through the famous Kentish regiments and they at school had given of their best. We had all learned to pull together during the war, and in peace it would not be otherwise. It was for us to show by our gratitude that those who have died had not died in vain, and to work together for the making of a better world....'

Far from subsiding, the exultant joy of the people as the day wore on increased. Many business premises were closed and practically a general holiday was

indulged in. As darkness set in the streets underwent quite a transformation. The illumination of the thoroughfares and the consequent comfort which the pedestrians enjoyed proved quite a novelty. The public availed themselves to the full privileges afforded under these pre-war conditions, and one party

of enthusiasts went so far as to make a bonfire in the roadway near the Rose and Crown, a number of tradesmen providing the necessary fuel until the flames reached to a height of many feet. Up to a late hour the High Street was filled with joy-makers who seemed loth to retire to their homes.'



November 1918: Tonbridge celebrates

2018: Tonbridge events to mark the Centenary of the end of WWI

By the time this Newsletter is published the WWI commemoration/re-enactment weekend will have taken place, but more events are planned. Look out for publicity nearer the time:

- The knitted poppy appeal from last year is being repeated with collecting 'bins' in the Library and the Tourist Information Centre at the Castle.
- 100 shops in Tonbridge will display photos of their premises 100 years ago.
- Sunday 7th October at Tonbridge School: 'Pack up your troubles - songs from WW1, WW2 to current'. Profits to Royal British Legion Poppy Appeal. Tickets £12.50, concessions £10.
- Friday Friday 26th October in the Medway Hall at the Angel Centre: 'The War is over', a selection of songs performed by Tom Carradine and others. Profits to Royal British Legion Poppy Appeal.

Here and there

Forthcoming History Courses

W.E.A. Courses in Tonbridge

Courses at the Methodist Church, Higham Lane:

More Historical Journeys through

England: 10 weeks from 25th

September 2018 10.15 – 12.30

Oxford and Cambridge

10 weeks from 15th January 2019

10.15 – 12.15

The Middle East – Why so much Conflict?

One day course, 12th January 2019

The Middle East- Future Prospects :

One day course, 16th March 2019

Courses at the Angel Centre, Tonbridge

Current International Affairs:

7 weeks from 30th October 2018

10.00 – 12.00

How the United States came into being:

One day course, 13th October 2018

Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War

One day course, 2nd February 2019

Kent Adult Education Courses at the

Adult Education Centre, Avebury Avenue

Four Week Courses:

Treasures of History – Medieval Britain

Start 27th September, 10.00 – 12.00

Treasures of History – The V&A

Start 1st November, 10.00 – 12.00

Lives of the Anglo-Saxon Kings

Start 7th February 2019, 10.00 – 12.00

Anglo-German Politics since the C19th

Start 5th March 2019, 19.00-21.00

The Brothers Plantagenet

Start 14th March 2019, 10.00 – 12.00

Three week Courses

Documents that shaped History

Start 29th November, 10.00 – 12.00

Secrets of the Bayeux Tapestry

Start 17th January 2019, 10.00 – 12.00

One day Courses

History Bewitched – C17th Witch Trials

20th October 2018, 10.00 – 13.00

Christmas through the Ages

1st December 2018, 10.00 – 13.00

Women's Suffrage in Kent

2nd February 2019 10.00 – 13.00

Acquisition

We are grateful to Pam Boorman for donating this sign from Tonbridge Telegraph Office.

