



Stonemason Albert Stanbridge at work on Tonbridge Castle in 1957. A programme of meticulous rescue and renovation was carried out on the castle between 1954 and 1966, under the leadership of the Borough Engineer, Mr Sydney Simmons, who died in December 2018. See page 6.

Society News

From the Chairman

I will be standing down as Chairman at the AGM in April so can I thank all the hard working committee members who keep the Society running and all the members whose enthusiasm and interest in history give the Society its purpose. As usual can I encourage you to consider coming onto the Committee or helping in any way you can with the running of the Society. Please contact any Committee member at one of our meetings if you would like further information, or e-mail *info@tonbridgehistory.org.uk*.

George Buswell

Subscriptions

Speakers' fees and expenses have risen rapidly in the last few years, and venue hire and postage have also increased. The Committee have therefore decided that in order to continue to attract the calibre of speakers we are used to, we need to raise the subscription fees. The new annual rates are shown in the column on the left and take effect this year. We expect and intend that no further increases will be necessary for several years to come. We are also introducing the option of paying subscription fees by standing order for those members who would prefer to do this rather than pay annually by cheque. Details are on the sheets accompanying this Newsletter.

Secretary's and Group Reports 2018-19

In past years these Reports have been read out at the AGM. This year we are publishing them here to make them available to all members, not just those attending the AGM. This will also help to streamline the AGM. Members wishing to find out more about these activities should get in touch with the Secretary in the first instance or speak to a Committee member at any of the Society's meetings.

Secretary's Report

The committee has met on four occasions since the AGM dealing with many requests for information on the historical aspects of the town. Younger people moving into the town are keen to investigate the history of their own home and are looking to our Society for help.

We are very grateful to George Buswell for staying as Acting Chairman for the extra year and for keeping us very much on our toes. George has indicated his willingness to stay on as archivist. Another person we must thank is Anthony Wilson who will be stepping down from the committee after many years of sterling work. Anthony has been responsible for the publication of many of our books together with running the website and he hopes to carry on with these activities even if he is not on the committee.

We have had a successful year averaging 77 people per meeting and attracting many visitors especially when the topic is of local interest. My thanks must go to all the wonderful cake makers amongst you and also thanks to the committee for all their support.

Madge Woods

Group Reports

Archaeology

My remit as leader of the Archaeology Group for THS is mainly to keep an eye on any building/road works in the

area and undertake occasional watching briefs on behalf of Kent County Council.

This year has been fairly quiet although I have as usual kept an eye on planning applications and various holes in the ground – road works etc. I am in touch with members of Kent Archaeological Society who have been monitoring progress with regard to the WW2 Pill Box in the grounds of Tonbridge School and visible from London Road near the junction with Shipbourne Road at Tonbridge School. We are still awaiting a report on the archaeological works that took place during the dualling of the A21, including the excavation of the brick and tile works at the foot of Castle Hill.

I would welcome more people to join me to help monitor local archaeology and also to report on anything that is of interest. Stray finds pop up in the strangest of places! If you have any such queries please get in touch with me. I can also provide information about the Kent Archaeological Society and its events and activities.

Archives

The Society's Archives (based at the Castle) continue to receive donations of Tonbridge related material – both documents and artefacts. In the past year we have received more items

from Sydney Simmons (see page 6), including a number of large legal documents handwritten on vellum, which were rescued from being cut up to make into lamp-shades! Also Pam Mills has given material, including display boards produced for the World War I Commemoration weekend. The Archive Catalogue is available on the Society's website, *www.tonbridgehistory.org.uk*. Any member wishing to look at an archive item should make contact and an appointment will be arranged.
George Buswell

Pictorial Records

This group looks after the Society's collection of historic photographs which number several thousand. We meet monthly in Tonbridge Castle to add in new material. This year we have received some photographs of the soldiers stationed in Tonbridge during WWI. These were collected by Pam Mills who organised events commemorating the 100 year anniversary last summer. As usual we promoted our Society on the Heritage Days in Tonbridge Castle. For the display this year I set the challenge of recognising our streets from old views of the town. This display was also shown as part of the Local History Fair organised by the Library on 6th October 2018. *Pat Hopcroft*

Research

A group of about eight of us are researching the mediaeval period with special reference to Tonbridge, aiming to publish a book that complements the society publication of Tonbridge through Ten Centuries. We look at mediaeval manuscripts from archive centres or online, mostly written in Latin and it is possible that many of

these are being revealed to Tonbridge historians for the first time. So far we have a comprehensive set of accounts for the 14th and 15th centuries with many supplementary texts. Although we are doing individual researches based on the subjects that most interest us, we meet about every two months to review progress. The topics we are covering include the castle and its household, the town and mills (including a record of a 12th century windmill), the churches in the district, the priory, the hunting chases and parks, the countryside and agriculture. In our continuing quest for original research, we are at the moment looking at material from the 14th century. *Deborah Cole*

Recent Meetings

Our opening talk in *September* was by Professor David Bates who used his recent biography of William the Conqueror to examine different perspectives on 1066 and the Norman Conquest – military, economic, social and political. England became part of a cross channel empire and had a new legal system, seen as just by William of Poitiers and as oppression by the Anglo Saxon Chronicle. William's harrying of the North in 1069-70 killed possibly 100,000 people and by the time of the Domesday Book in 1087 there had been a reduction of 75% in the number of plough teams compared to 1066. David concluded by saying that this threw up the question of what was 'legitimate violence in medieval society'.

In *October* Pam Mills spoke about Tonbridge in World War I, drawing upon all the detailed research she has carried out into the subject. 346 Tonbridge men are listed on the Memorial Wall but probably nearly 400 in total died. Tonbridge was one of 200 designated stops for ambulance

trains and the first casualties (Belgian and French soldiers) from the fighting arrived in Tonbridge in early October 1914. The first death here was on November 19th - a Belgian soldier called Louis Marx who was buried in Tonbridge Cemetery. A Red Cross hospital was set up on Quarry Hill run by Jessie Taylor who was the headmistress of Tonbridge Girls Grammar School. There was a POW camp at the Priory on Bordyke, housing 38 German soldiers. Tonbridge's WWI memorial was built by Henry Spickett and put up in 1921 at the bottom of Pembury Road and was replaced in 1952 when the Memorial Garden was built.

Robert Stephenson gave the talks for our two session meeting in *November*. He is a City of London heritage guide and in his first talk he looked at the establishment and growth of the Knights Templar and at their London connections. In 1130 the Templars set up a base in High Holborn but then moved in 1160 nearer to the Thames and built the circular Temple Church just off the Strand. Other links are the Temple Gardens and Temple Bar. His second talk looked at some of the many traditions and ceremonies connected

to London. There is the Trial of the Picks carried out in Goldsmith Hall to check on coinage quality, an annual 'clowns' service to remember Joseph Grimaldi who died in London in 1837 and is regarded as the first clown, and the Tower of London has its nightly ceremony of the keys which has been taking place for nearly 700 years.

Our speaker in *December* was Wilf Lower who gave a fascinating talk about the Golden Age of Television based on his work in the BBC's Scenic Operations department. He looked at famous drama series like the Forsyte Saga, comedy shows such as Morecambe and Wise and the Two Ronnies and 'sit-coms' like The Liver Birds, Till Death us Do Part and Steptoe and Son. The most successful was Dad's Army which ran to 9 series with 60 programmes and has been sold to over 70 countries

In *February* Andrew Wood talked about old Kent Windmills using a wide range of both old and new pictures to illustrate his presentation - including some taken with drone photography. Locally he showed pictures of the windmill that used to stand in Watt's Cross, Hildenborough and the Bidborough windmill.

'Shops in Shipbourne Road' by Tonbridge artist George Mackley (THS Archives)



Sydney Simmons

No-one did more to shape the development of Tonbridge in the decades after World War II than Sydney Simmons, who has died at the age of 101.

Following distinguished service in the War, he served as Tonbridge's Borough Engineer from the 1950s until the local government reorganisation in 1974, working from an office within the Castle. Among many projects during this time he oversaw the huge expansion of North Tonbridge, pushed through the creation of the 'mini-bypass', and was the driving force behind the development of Poulton Wood Golf Course. He chose the names for many new roads and was careful to ensure that local historic names were preserved.



In retirement – a relative term – he was able to devote more of his great energy and enthusiasm to local history, becoming the 'go-to' authority on Tonbridge's past. He served as THS chairman and would later donate enough research material to fill an entire shelf in the Society's archive collection. One of his major projects was the transcription and publication of the records of the Town Wardens from the 16th to the 18th century.

But his greatest passion as a historian was Tonbridge Castle – both the building itself and its history, about which he published a number of substantial articles in the Kentish history journal *Archaeologia Cantiana*. We owe to him the fact that the fabric



The Castle gatehouse c1912...



.... and in 2012

of the castle is in such fine condition today. Over 12 years in the 1950s and 60s he oversaw the work of a small team of stonemasons tasked with reversing the effects of centuries of neglect during which ivy and tree saplings had rooted into the stonework. Many of the original exterior stones, known as ashlars, were loose and had to be carefully removed and reset after roots and vegetation had

been cleared. Every stage of the work was meticulously recorded, and wherever possible the 20th century masons used the same materials and techniques as their mediaeval predecessors in the 13th and worked to the same exacting standards.

Tonbridge Castle as we see it today is fitting and enduring testimony to the long life and many achievements of this remarkable man.

Farewell to the Primrose

Planning permission was granted in January for the demolition of the Primrose Inn at the top of Pembury Road, described as ‘one of the few unaltered Tonbridge survivors of a characteristic Kentish building type’.

The weather-boarded building, perhaps dating from the 1820s, was

a pub for at least 150 years, but was not a Listed Building on the national register. (Apparently Tonbridge and Malling is one of the few authorities in England that does not maintain its own Local List of Heritage Assets, which can provide added protection in cases like this.)



150 years ago

Petty crime in Tonbridge in 1869 as reported in the Maidstone Journal

A youth named Thomas Coverley was charged with attempting to pick several person's pockets at the [Tonbridge] races (3 months jail).

Zacharias -- , a shopkeeper, was fined five shillings plus costs for having in his possession an unjust scale [for cheating his customers].

John Marney, a lad, was charged with stealing a sixpence (discharged as he had already spent time in custody).

Thomas Bailey was charged with trespassing in search of coneyes (fined 5 shillings plus costs).

William Johnston, a tramp, was charged with stealing a bagging hook, a hat and 5 shillings and quarrelling with a woman in a hop garden.

George Hussey was charged with unlawful drinking. He said he had some herrings for breakfast which were rather salty and his thirst was so great that he had to go and get a pint of beer (fined 2s/6d plus costs).

Sarah Morris, a hopper, was charged with being drunk and riotous in the High street (sentenced to 4 days in prison).

Samuel Lucas, a boy, was charged with stealing a quantity of apples value one penny (discharged with a caution).

Stephen Collins pleaded guilty to stealing 15lb of lead and selling it (14 days in prison).

Nine hoppers were charged with assaulting police constable Emmanuel Haynes in the execution of his duty and attempting to rescue a prisoner from his custody.

Daniel Jury and James Hider were charged on suspicion of stealing two fowls. (Two small feathers had been found in Jury's pocket.)

Thomas Gainsford was charged with stealing a bottle containing 2 gallons of gin, value of 32 shillings.

George Vine, a monkey performer, was charged with assaulting a woman at the Black Doll lodging house. (They quarrelled after Vine began to ill-use the monkey) (committed for trial at the assizes).

A lad named John May pleaded guilty to destroying 4 trout (fined 14 shillings or 14 days imprisonment).

William Fredericks pleaded guilty to stealing two coats valued £2 (He was unable to speak English and used an interpreter) (1 month's hard labour).

Charles Gordon Cooke was charged with uttering a counterfeit half crown and a shilling at Tonbridge shops (12 month's hard labour).