

# Tonbridge Historical Society

NEWSLETTER

Spring 2022

## From the Chairman

As I write this, we are heading to complete a successful season of talks since last September. Hopefully, we shall be able to look forward to returning to some form of normality over the coming summer months.

Our final meeting this season includes our AGM and I have two items pertaining to the AGM. Firstly, I am happy to report that the Committee has decided to keep the coming year's subscription at our current rates. However, The Society faces mounting costs, not least unexpected bank charges -- more in the Treasurer's Report. Therefore, we will need to review the subscription in the coming months. I believe our current subscription offers extremely good value for money compared to comparable organisations and I would be loath to increase it unnecessarily. One way to help save the Society money is that Membership fees are paid through Standing Order. I would ask members who do not already pay through SO's to seriously think about this method of payment.

Lastly, the old perennial, Committee Membership. Currently the Committee is running on the very basic number of members which leaves the running of the Society to a few. The Society plays a key role in the recording of Tonbridge's history and has built up an impressive archive of historic material, Therefore, if the Society is to flourish, can I ask members to give very serious consideration to joining the Committee and helping keep up our good work. Please speak to myself or any other committee member for further information or submit proposal forms - from the Secretary - by 31st March 2022.

Finally, enjoy this newsletter and stay safe.

*David Phillips*

PS: *Members' 2021 Standing Orders.* I would like to thank all those members who generously donated their 2021 subscription, either through Standing Order or other means, for the Covid period. The Committee has decided that this sum, £436.00, be put into a general fund to be used for the benefit of the Society. I will keep you informed when a decision has been made.

## Christopher Chalklin

We are saddened to let you know that Dr Christopher Chalklin, founder member of our society and later its president, died last August at the age of eighty-eight after a period of increasing frailty.

Christopher Chalklin was born in Hendon in 1933, but moved to New Zealand in 1946 when his father was appointed professor of physics at the University of Canterbury. Following a first degree at the University of Canterbury, Christopher returned to the UK for National Service in the Army Educational Corps, something he rarely mentioned. After National Service his first employment was at the County Archives Office in Maidstone as assistant archivist in 1957 staying until 1962 which put him in an ideal position to further his historical research interests. After he left Kent Archives he took up a position at the University of Wales before moving to the University of Reading in 1967 where he remained until retirement, his appointment being a readership post.

Dr Chalklin came from a family with very close connections to Tonbridge going back several generations. He was anxious to maintain his links with the town and many of his research projects were based on very local topics. >>

From 1967 over a period of three years he ran an evening research course at Tonbridge Library for the Society to study life in nineteenth century Tonbridge. From this came the Society's first publication 'Early Victorian Tonbridge'. This was the first of a number of increasingly ambitious publications that he edited. He fired the contributors, all of whom were members of the Historical Society, with a great feeling for research within the town which continues and grows to this day. He was extremely enthusiastic about his involvement with the Society and maintained his connection up to the time of his death having, until he became quite frail, been our President -- a position he only surrendered when the journey from his home in Guildford became more tiring.

Away from the Society Christopher Chalklin was at his happiest working on his research projects and was a well-respected author of several economic history books, including 'The Development of the English Town 1650-1850', and also completed an Oxford B.Litt. thesis on Tonbridge, 'A Kentish Wealden Parish (Tonbridge) 1550-1750', as well as books on Tunbridge Wells. He was also a long-standing, well respected and knowledgeable member of the Kent Archaeological Society, sitting on the Council for many years and serving as a Vice President.

Christopher was a quiet and deep thinking man and an erudite and interesting companion. He had so much knowledge to share, and was happy to discuss many different aspects of his life in general as well as his views on anything historical and archaeological. The Historical Society has been fortunate to have his staunch support over so many years. His knowledge and friendship are much missed.

*Shiela Broomfield and Pat Mortlock*

## 100 years ago

### Unemployment and the new River Walk

Tonbridge's new River Walk opened in 1922, running alongside the Medway from the Big Bridge round to Barden Road as it does today. Described as 'the best half-mile of river walk in the County', it owes its existence to the rising unemployment in the country after the end of World War I.

A news item in the Kent & Sussex Courier on 17 December 1920 explains how Tonbridge would respond to the challenge:

#### UNEMPLOYMENT AT TONBRIDGE -- SCHEMES TO RELIEVE DISTRESS'

*'The following statement has been issued by the Tonbridge Urban District Council: In view of the very serious spread of unemployment in the town, a Committee has been set up representing all classes to consider the best means of meeting the emergency.*

*A register is being compiled recording the names and particulars of unemployed workers. Upwards of 300 persons, including about 100 married men, are at present needing employment.*

*Work of a useful character will be provided, such as the construction of River Walk' ... 'The rate of pay for labour will be 1s 2d per hour, and in all cases preference will be given to men with families'.... To help meet the cost, 'every person in receipt of earnings or other income shall be requested to contribute a sum of not less than 3d weekly.'*

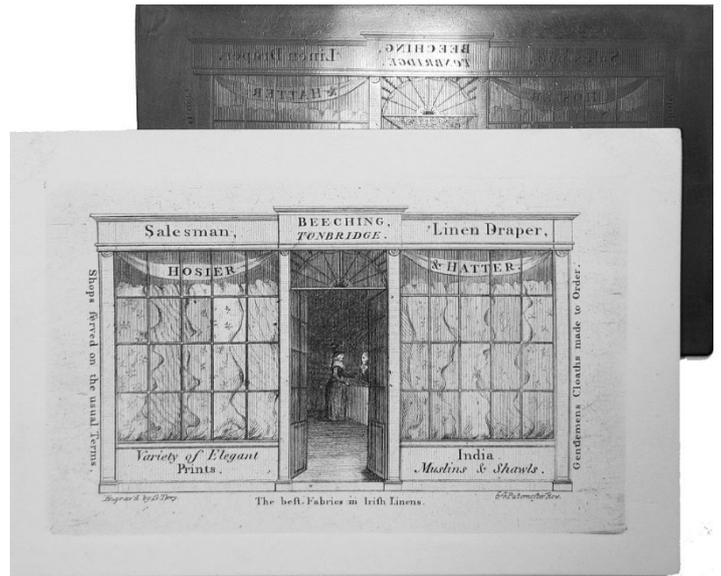


*Christopher Chalklin (centre) with Stella Hardy and Sydney Simmons in 1970*

## Recent acquisition 1

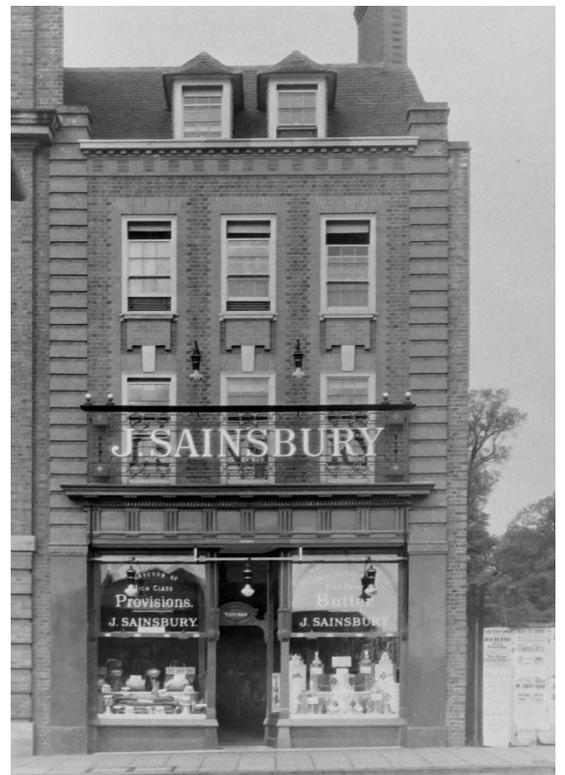
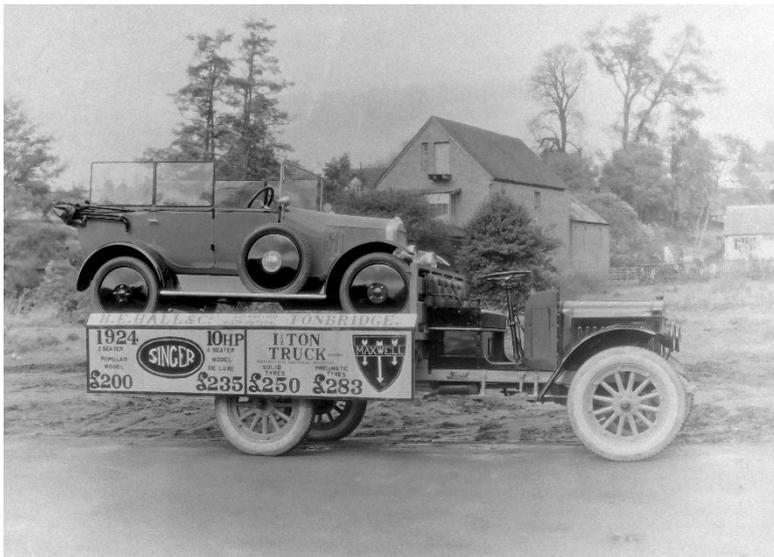
*Original copper plate used in printing publicity material for Thomas Beeching.*

Thomas Beeching, Salesman, Linen Draper, Hosier & Hatter, opened his shop on the corner of Church Lane and the High Street, in 1789. Described as a man of the strictest integrity, he also served the community as a banker. The plate is shown here together with a copy of an image printed from it. (THS/A041). Donated by Mr B Canter.



## Recent acquisition 2

Collection of glass photographic negatives from Allworks, photographers, showing local scenes in the 1920s, donated by Colin Beer. A small selection is reproduced here. All are copyright © Allworks.



*Above left:* car and truck offered for sale by H E Hall and Co. Halls built and sold vehicles from their High Street premises.

*Above right:* J Sainsbury, just north of the Humphry Bean. Now occupied by the Oriental Buffet.

*Overleaf - top:* unidentified garage and filling station.

*middle:* the SETAR (South Eastern Tar Distillers) depot, near the Vale Rise roundabout, now a new commercial development.

*bottom:* premises at the south end of Shipbourne Road, with drinking fountain and phone box.

