



## From the Chair

Welcome to the first of three newsletters the Society proposes to publish this year, since Tonbridge has such an interesting and diverse story to tell. To assist in telling that story, the Society 'dipped its toes' into social media in early December '23 with the launch on Facebook of items from Tonbridge Archives; more about this below.

The Society plays a key role in the recording of Tonbridge's history and given the current media 'chatter' around potential developments in the town the coming years will see many changes in Tonbridge. Therefore, the Society should be prepared to ensure that a comprehensive and accurate record is made of both its still undiscovered past as well as its future. Which brings me to that perennial problem: committee membership; especially important this year when we require a new secretary.

Madge has decided after 10 years to stand down at the forthcoming AGM. The secretary is an important role, one that acts as the 'glue and the oil' that helps keep the Society together and running smoothly; without one we would be in a very difficult place. Please can I ask members to give serious consideration about acting as secretary or joining the committee to help continue our good work. Anyone interested can speak to myself or any other committee member for further information.

*David Phillips*

## Tonbridge Archives

I'd like to let you know about a recently launched Facebook page to publicise the THS archives.

It can be found here

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/thsearchives> and is named simply 'Tonbridge Archives'.

I've picked up that a lack of a social media presence may have prevented donations being directed towards THS. Instead, collections have been passed to individuals or groups that through social media provide a perception that they are in some way historical archives for the town. It's also a good way of reaching a wider audience and developing interest in the wider activities of THS.

Having discussed with David and George, the intention is to post copies of images, artefacts and documents from the archives together with some

brief text. Where possible the accompanying text will be taken from a THS publication and there will be a link back to the relevant page of the THS website. In the first week alone, the page has gained almost 100 followers!

I will be happy to answer any questions or provide further information if you are unable to access Facebook. All suggestions for future posts welcomed. Thanks,

*Mark Ansdell*

## A Falklands Veteran

Admiral of the fleet: Terence Thornton Lewin, Baron Lewin, [KG](#), [GCB](#), [LVO](#), [DSC](#) (1920 -1999) served in WW2 as well as in the 1982 Falklands conflict. He was



educated at the Judd School in Tonbridge and lived at 3, Waterloo Road, in a house now commemorated by a blue plaque. Since he may be the subject of a future talk, I will limit my

observations to the history of the Falkland Islands, which my wife and I visited in 2015.

The history of the islands is fraught and complex. The probable first sighting was by an Englishman, John Davis, in the Desire (1592). The name, Falkland Islands, was given by Captain John Strong in 1690. Originally, the name in honour of [Viscount Falkland](#), was given to the sound separating East and West Falkland. Later, it was applied to the whole island group. In 1764 the first settlement was founded, on East Falkland, by the French navigator [Louis-Antoine de Bougainville](#). Unfortunately, he took it upon himself to rename the islands the Malouines. Sadly, the consequences of that decision are still with us today. The first British settlement was on West Falkland, probably circa 1765. After being overrun by the Spanish, a threat of war led to British sovereignty being restored in 1771.

Today, financially, the islands are self-sufficient and have a population fiercely loyal to Britain. This website sums up the history and modern status of the islands: [Our home \(falklands.gov.fk\)](http://falklands.gov.fk). If you ever go there, you will find a happy, prosperous and friendly



population who are always anxious to express their gratitude for the British expulsion of the Argentine invaders. You will also find penguins. When we were there, we couldn't understand why our party moved so far away from us when we

took these photos. It soon became apparent: do not stand downwind of a penguin colony!  
*Geoff Rishman*

## Archaeological matters

Shiela would like to mention the Council for British Archaeology South East of which she is trustee and membership secretary. The website address is [www.cbasmouth-east.org](http://www.cbasmouth-east.org). This is definitely worth perusing! The link leads you to an excellent website complete with newsletters. These, according to this section, changed to nearly all digital from the Spring 2016 issue.

## Elias Allen

Not a name that springs immediately to mind as influential or of any significance, Allen (c 1588 – March 1653) was a Tonbridge-born maker of sundials and



scientific instruments. He moved to London sometime before 1602, when he became apprenticed to a London clockmaker. His instruments were used by the Stuart kings and others, including mathematicians Edmund Gunter and William [Oughtred](#), for

whom he made the World's first slide rule. Oughtred

wrote to him in 1638 saying: "I have here sent you directions (as you requested me being at Twickenham) about the making of the two rulers. I would gladly see one of them when it is finished, which yet I never have done".

Sadly, the instrument has not survived.

Between 19 January 1637 and 29 July 1638, Allen served as Master of the London Clockmakers Company.

For a full biography of the man, whose name is all but obscured by the mists of time, click this link to a [Cambridge University thesis](#) by Catherine Higton. You will simply have to agree to certain conditions – and download the Higton thesis - but it is well worth it!  
*Geoff Rishman*

## Newsletter

I am deeply conscious that this newsletter is *your* newsletter. For that reason, I would really welcome any article you wish to include. Either write it yourself or send me the gist of what you have in mind and I'll see that it is written. Of course, you will be acknowledged as the originator, unless modesty prevents this! My email address is [pentpilot@outlook.com](mailto:pentpilot@outlook.com) deadline 8 June 2024  
Looking forward to hearing from you!  
*Geoff Rishman*

## The face of the past

I have always been fascinated by this thought: what did the ordinary man and woman of the past look like? There were, in my history lessons at school, well-meaning but misconceived efforts to deify the giants. How often do we hear: there'll never be another like him or her? Lord Chesterfield, in one of his many wise entreaties to his son said: *Speak of the moderns without contempt, and of the ancients without idolatry.*

When I was young, wars were won by kings and queens. The ordinary foot soldier or jolly tar never featured; yet these were the people that made victories possible: *they* won the wars but their overwhelming contribution was overlooked and ignored by the social conventions of the times. So, what has caused this thought to resurface now? I was perusing past copies of our own newsletters, when I came across a reference to Samuel Wheeler: a Waterloo veteran of advanced age. This was an extract from the Tonbridge Free Press of 1872 [ths-newsletter-22-autumn-for-website.pdf](#) ([tonbridgehistory.org.uk](http://tonbridgehistory.org.uk)) I tried to Google Samuel but, sadly, for me, the trail ran cold. Not so for our treasurer, Pam Boorman,

however! Pam, by dark arts and careful research, has uncovered a wealth of material on him. There is so much here, that a separate article will appear in a subsequent newsletter. Hopefully – written by Pam! This whole episode reminded me of photographs in a book I have had for many years and, of which I am very fond. This book, called “A Country Camera 1844 – 1914” has many pictures of ordinary domestic life including pictures of people born when the USA was still a British colony and Bonnie Prince Charlie was still alive! I reproduce the ISBN number if anyone is interested: ISBN 0 1400 3670 9. Actually, it can still be bought! [Amazon.co.uk : a country camera 1844-1914 gordon winter](http://Amazon.co.uk : a country camera 1844-1914 gordon winter)

Within in this book is a picture of a Waterloo veteran. I still get a feeling of fascination to think “here is an actual man who fought with Wellington!” A similar picture can be found online and is reproduced here: [Photograph of Waterloo Veterans, 1880 - Age of Revolution](#)



What I find truly fascinating about this photograph, are the two gentlemen at the back, who seem to be the fittest! Look at John McKay, wounded at Badajoz and Waterloo, 95 years old yet the picture of health! Standing up, while his younger compatriots are seemingly so infirm that they must sit!  
Geoff Rishman

### The Great Eastern at Sheerness

That same newsletter had an item about the loading of communication cable to the Great Eastern lying in the Medway above Sheerness. Brunel’s great ship was built and launched on the Thames. The launching ramp is still visible to this day. There is an excellent website which has a huge amount of information on this troubled, but magnificent, feat of visionary

engineering. Have a look at this website: [History of the Atlantic Cable & Submarine Telegraphy - Great Eastern \(atlantic-cable.com\)](http://History of the Atlantic Cable & Submarine Telegraphy - Great Eastern (atlantic-cable.com))

Here, you will find so much information and many



The old frigate *Iris* with her freight of cable alongside the *Great Eastern* at Sheerness. The cable passed from the hulk to the *Great Eastern*.

stereoscopic photographs. Nothing brings the past to life better than these. Print them off and use a 3d viewer, otherwise, do as I do, and use the cross-eye technique to merge the images!

### The Tonbridge Club

The Medway School of Dancing, 145 High Street,



occupies an ornate building with decorative brickwork, an oriel window and an impressive finial on the gable.

This property was constructed to house the Tonbridge Club, an

exclusive gentleman's club established in November 1884. By 1893 the Tonbridge Club Company Ltd was economically sound and in need of "larger and more convenient premises" (Tonbridge Free Press, May 1893). At this time the club occupied temporary offices at 97a High Street.

Cuttings from the Tonbridge Free Press give an insight into a bygone era. The announcement of a tender specification, 5 August 1893, describes details for the proposed building "which from its exterior view will prove a handsome and picturesque addition to the architecture of the High Street... From the elegance of its tracery and other moulded work with which it has been liberally enriched, (it will) form the keynote for a style which lends itself readily to the artistic treatment, and which, although slightly more costly, is far more handsome than the plain and severe types in which business houses too often, at the present day, are designed". Apart from the frontage on the ground floor, very few changes have been made to its exterior over the years.

Requirements for the interior of the building are fully described in the specification. The ground floor was to comprise two offices, which were subsequently let to Mr Richard Preston, solicitor and Mr J W Little, architect, by the Tonbridge Club Company Ltd. The club's suite of rooms, on the first and second floors was to be accessed "by a large and centrally-placed staircase, rising by an easy gradient to the first floor and lighted from a skylight". On the first floor "three large rooms devoted to reading, smoking and recreation, with accommodation for the steward and cloakroom". The second floor was to include a billiard room for two tables, committee room and toilets. Within the building today the staircase with skylight above, the beautiful windows and an original fireplace remain intact.

The tender was won by G J Jones, Tonbridge, for the sum of "£2,393 or £2,513 with the extension of basement and warming".

Existing shops on the site occupied by Mrs Woolley and Messrs Ffolliott and Payne were to be demolished and the new building expected to be completed within a few months.

The Tonbridge Club remained in this building for approximately 40 years, until its closure at the end of 1935. On 3 January 1936 an announcement appeared in the Sales by Auction section of the Tonbridge Free Press listing the sale of contents on 6 January 1936, which included items essential to a gentleman's club such as easy chairs in leather, billiard room settees,

tables and cues, writing, refreshment and card tables, plus 93 volumes of "Punch" (1841-1933). The "important and valuable freehold premises" were also included in the notice.

Special care had been taken in the design of the property to enable it to be used for other purposes in the event of liquidation of the club. Following its closure, the building has undergone a number of uses. From 1939 to 1949, it was the local office for the Ministry of Food with TUDC Sanitary Inspectors next door at no 147. The Medway School of Dancing has occupied the site since 1970.



*Article by Cathy Rishman with press cuttings provided by Pam Mills and*

*interior photo from the Medway School of Dancing. Copies of the cuttings are stored in the archives. Please contact George Buswell.*

## On emailing the newsletter

Advocating digital newsletters:

Consider these facts: 2<sup>nd</sup> class postage is 75p for a 100g standard letter; postage costs for 30 people: £22.50. Cost for email promulgation: essentially nil.

A second advantage is the expanded scope, through hyperlinks, for further reading. Please let me have your opinions on this.

Geoff Rishman [pentpilot@outlook.com](mailto:pentpilot@outlook.com)

## Memorable Quotes



"A weak mind is like a microscope, which magnifies trifling things, but cannot receive great ones"

**Philip Dormer Stanhope,  
4th Earl of Chesterfield,**

(22 Sept. 1694 – 24 Mar. 1773)

Click the picture for more information. For more quotes: click this link. [Philip Stanhope, 4th Earl of Chesterfield - Wikiquote](#)