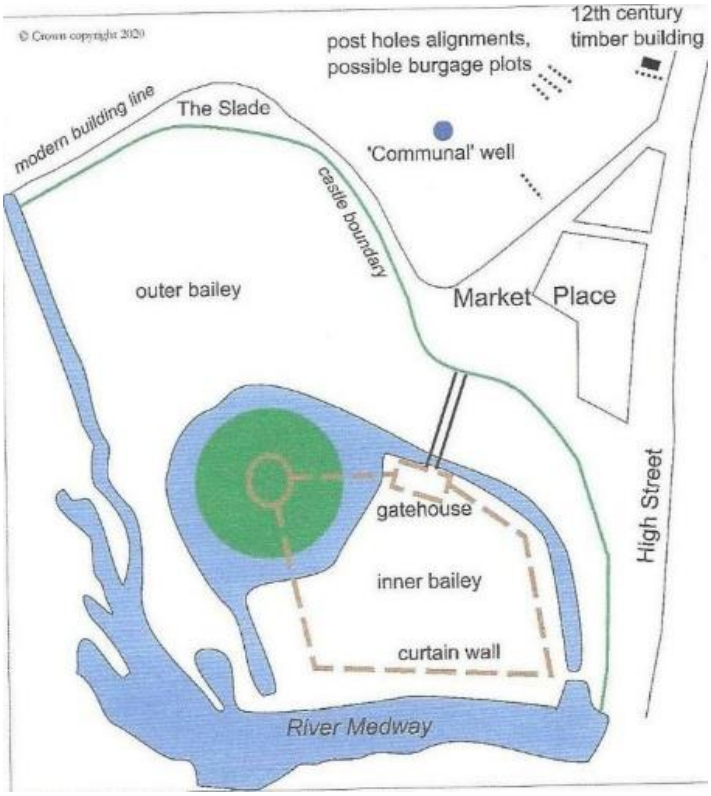
# Tonbridge Historical Society

# Spring 2026 Newsletter

## The Medieval Marketplace of Tonbridge]

The original marketplace was situated outside the gates of the castle, broadly in the triangle formed today by the High Street, Castle Street and Bank Street. At some point in the fifteenth century, it moved to the High Street




near the Chequers Inn. A set of manorial accounts for Tonbridge dating from 1384-85, which are now held in the library of Canterbury Cathedral, provide a little more information about the market during that year. The accounts show that there were twenty-six stalls and each paid 2d a year to the manorial lord for the right to trade there. However, the accounts also show that there was an attempt to provide an alternative ‘shopping experience’ for the inhabitants of Tonbridge and record income of 12s from eight more stalls which had been set up in the High Street. They did not last though as ‘the said stalls having recently been thrown down have been seized by the lord...because he testifies, [they] were erected to the harm of the market of the lord’. It is unclear as to who authorized the erection of the stalls, but it may well have been the bailiff for the town, William Hore. The new stalls would have provided more income for the manorial lord and clearly there was an expectation that they could be successfully let. But it was not to be, and it seems that the existing stallholders in the market were able to convince the lord to close down the new venture because it threatened their businesses. The accounts, as was usual at that time, were in Latin and record that the new stalls had been in the ‘alto vico de Tonebrigge’. In classical Latin the word ‘vico’ could be used to describe a wider area such as a village as well as a street, but by the fourteenth century it was used in a more restricted way for a high street or highway. So, the stalls were in the ‘High Street of Tonbridge’. Incidentally, this is the first known reference to Tonbridge High Street although it is likely that the term was in use before 1385.

## Tonbridge Historical Society Member's Working Group

Over the last few months, there has been some great work undertaken behind the scenes of the society by a member's working group. The creation of the working group resulted from a member's discussion at the 2025 AGM. The aim of the working group has been to promote the presence of the Society to the wider community and to be more inclusive of all age groups, to revitalise membership and to best place the Society going forward. The tone of the group has been evolution, not revolution, continuing to cater for existing members with the majority of what the society currently offers and at the same time adding more enticing content for younger members and families to increase active membership. The working group has met regularly and comprises Mark Ansdell (Chair) Jack Bennett, Jane Richardson, Maureen MacLoed, Cathy Rishman and
Jenny Poxon.

To inform the working group, a questionnaire has been made available to all members via email and in hardcopy at both the meetings in November and December. Thank you to all that took the time to compete the form. The results provide the following headlines:

An equal number of respondents have a preference for local history and general history.

There is interest in both an oral history project and for research groups.

Very strong support for the publication of leaflets.

Most members prefer to receive the newsletter via email - Quarterly and 4-sided is the preferred format for newsletters.

There is very strong support for an annual event incorporating walks.

There is strong support for the website to contain more content relating to Tonbridge.

So, in collaboration with Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council, Tonbridge History Weekend is now in the planning stage and will incorporate walks, talks and an exhibition of artefacts and images from the archives of the society across the weekend of 23rd to 25th May this year.

Members are encouraged to take part - Would you like to help with curating the exhibition? Perhaps you have a specific area of knowledge regarding a Tonbridge subject, person or place and would like to lead a walk or talk?

If you would like to be involved, please contact Mark Ansdell (mark.ansdell@btinternet.com)

**Planning Update**

Over the last months the Society have made several submissions relation to the ongoing development of the proposed Borough's Local Plan 2024 - 2042 and the redevelopment of the east side of the High Street and the proposed new Angel Centre. I list below the key elements from the above submissions to save space for other articles!

**Local Plan 2024 – 2042**

The Society split their response into two sections one from a Borough wide perspective as well as a Tonbridge perspective.

**A Borough Wide Perspective**
The borough has a wide-ranging tapestry of historic landscapes and buildings ranging from prehistoric, Roman, medieval to a more modern history. The proposed development locations give the Council the chance to enhance and develop this historical knowledge often in areas where no meaningful archaeological investigations have taken place previously.

Developers must provide a well-manged and resourced programme of archaeological assessment. It cannot be treated as a tick-box exercise. Where appropriate consideration should be given for a series of Community Archaeological Projects within the development programme.

The Society fully supports the development of a Borough Wide Local List of Non-designated Historic Assets and would be a willing participant in this exercise.

The Society is not against development provided the proposed developments respects the locations historical background and landscape. The Society could support developments that sensitively incorporate existing historical features into their schemes and is dependent on the final proposals brought forward

**A Tonbridge Perspective**
Many of the issues addressed above also appertain to Tonbridge. The Society highlighted the non-existence of any meaningful archaeological excavations and assessment south of the Big Bridge and the railway where numerous developments are proposed and the need for adequate archaeological excavation, assessment and recording in these areas.

The Society provided an overview of the known historical landscape and background in relation to the other locations namely Coblands Nursery, Higham Woods, Lower Haysden Lane and the Priory Road locations.

The Society provided a strategic overview of the development of the towns infrastructure and road network from the prehistory trackway through the development of the various utility services from the 1836 to the modern age.

**East of the High Street & Angel Centre Consultations**
The Society view was the same as the key issues as described above. The Society also was forceful in insisting that there must be meaningful Community space and facilities within any new layout to ensure the support of the Society.

The loss of community space would greatly hinder the work of those organisations and would be grave loss to the social fabric of the town.

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**From the Chair**

I am standing down as Chair at the forthcoming AGM in April so can I thank all the very hard-working committee members who keep the Society running and especially to all the members whose enthusiasm and interest in history give the Society its purpose.

On reflection my tenure has not been without it challenges. Within my first year the Society's business came to an abrupt hault in February 2020 when the Government introduced the first lock down caused by Covid-15. It would be seventeen months before we met again in person on Wednesday 20th June 2021 at The Castle for the successful launch of Deborah Cole's excellent 'Medieval Tonbridge Revealed'.

There have been many highs, too many to list, but I believe the Society is in a very strong position to face the challenges that await in the years ahead. The first probably coming in the Spring of 2028 when the new Angel Centre is due to open!

To meet the challenges ahead we need a robust and healthy committee. We have vacancies on the Committee, and can I make a request to any member who would like to join, it's not too onerous, to get in touch with the Acting Secretary, any committee member or myself.

Finally, thank you again for your support and I look forward to assisting the Society in whatever capacity the future holds.

*David Phillips – Acting Chair*

## Our thanks to Pat Hopcroft.

On behalf of the Society, I would like to express our gratitude and thanks to Pat who after many years of active service to the Society has decided to step down from the Committee. One of Pat's great achievements is setting up and managing the picture archive which now holds some 8,000+ photographs and postcards which is a remarkable legacy of Tonbridge history in both film and print with only a small proportion visible on the website. We look forward to seeing Pat and Derek sitting in the audience at our forth coming meetings.

I am pleased to say the Madge Woods has very kindly offered to take over Pat's role and I wish her every success, it will sure be a hard act to follow.

*David Phillips – Acting Chair*