

# Tonbridge History

Autumn 2012

## TONBRIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

*Photo above: Diamond Jubilee, 1897. This rather smudgy photograph is the only one in the Society's collection that shows the town decorated for Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. The Free Library in the High Street (now Barclay's Bank) is tastefully decorated, while the Fire Station next door is festooned with foliage and bunting. The fire engine itself can just be seen, as can a framed portrait of the Queen above it. (THS Pictorial Collection 23A.082)*

### From the Chairman:

The THS Records are a brilliant source of links to the celebrations and anniversaries we have in Britain this year.

Who would have thought that Dr John Gorham of Tonbridge had a son who competed in the 1908 Olympics. (Find out more on page 7.)

Dickens' bicentenary has been rather overshadowed this year, but in 1850 he visited the Tonbridge Telegraph Office by the railway station and then wrote about it in *Household Words*. (Details on the THS website.)

As for the Diamond Jubilee – one can only admire the effort Tonbridge must have put into the decorations and loyal address in 1897. (See above and page 6.)

*Jenny Poxon*

## Society News

### Tonbridge Historical Society

Founded: 1960

*President* – Joy Debney

*Past Presidents* – Stella Hardy MBE,  
Joan Thirsk CBE, Christopher  
Chalklin

### Committee

*Chairman* – Jenny Poxon

*Vice Chairman* – George Buswell

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

*Treasurer* – Pat Mortlock,  
6 Keswick Close, Tonbridge TN9 1LP

*Minutes & Archives* – Sally Robbins

*Publicity & Website* – Anthony Wilson

*Refreshments Organiser* – vacant

### Other Committee Members:

Deborah Cole

Vanessa King

### Co-opted Members:

Shiela Broomfield (*Archaeology*)

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

*website*: [www.tonbridgehistory.org.uk](http://www.tonbridgehistory.org.uk)

*Subscription*: £7 per person (£3.00 for under-18s), due on 1<sup>st</sup> March annually for the following season.

Non-members are welcome as guests at all meetings on payment of £2 at the door (£1 for under-18s).

### From the Secretary

I think we have put together a fascinating programme for the next season which I hope you will enjoy and I look forward to seeing you all on Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> September at the Angel Centre. Enjoy the sun now it has arrived! – *Madge Woods*

### Lecture Programme 2012-13

All meetings are in the Riverside Room at the Angel Centre.

*Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> September, 7.45 pm*

**Artificial Light – an illuminating history of domestic light**

Our speaker, Peter Gillman, is a volunteer at Knole and is on the speaking panel of the National Trust Southern Region. His mother was a very early member of our Society.

*Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> October, 7.45 pm*

**Hospitals and Almshouses**

A short illustrated history of English medieval hospitals and their almshouse successors, with examples from Kent. Our speaker, David Carder, is a lecturer on historic buildings for the WEA in Kent and is a member of the Churches Committee and the Historic Buildings Committee of the Kent Archaeological Society.

*Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> November, 2.30 pm*

(Two-session meeting with tea. Booking required: form enclosed with this Newsletter)

In the first of two related talks, **Victorian London**, we will hear of the significant changes to London

in the Victorian period. This will be followed after tea by **Victorian Leisure and Pleasure**. The Victorians made an enormous contribution in building our modern world. This included many of the recreational activities that we take for granted – the theatre, organised sport, going to the seaside, fairgrounds, music hall and much more. Our speaker, Ian Bevan, is a City of London Guide Lecturer and a lecturer for the WEA.

*Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> December, 7.45 pm*

### **The Queen and the 1950s**

In this Jubilee year this is a very topical talk given by Dr John Ray, who needs little introduction to the people of Tonbridge. Dr Ray taught history for forty years and has written many books.

*Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> February 2013, 7.45pm*

### **Black Travellers in 19<sup>th</sup> century Africa**

Our speaker, David Killingray, is Emeritus Professor of History at Goldsmiths, and a Senior Research Fellow in the School of Advanced Study, both University of London; also an Honorary Professor of History at Stellenbosch University. He has written and edited more than a dozen books on aspects of African, Caribbean, Imperial, and English local history. He is president of the Sevenoaks Historical Society, and chairs the Publications Committee of the Kent Archaeological Society.

*Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> March 2013, 7.45 pm*

### **'Policing the Past': a decade of fighting heritage crime in Kent and beyond.**

Our speaker, Andrew Richardson, is employed as Finds Manager at Canterbury Archaeological Trust. He is a

police support volunteer specialising in helping Kent police to combat heritage-related crime. Andrew is also a long-standing member of the Kent Archaeological Society and is now curator of the Society's important collection of archaeological finds, which is housed in Maidstone Museum.

*Thursday, 25<sup>th</sup> April 2013, 7.30pm*

AGM, followed by

### **The Norman Conquest**

Many members will recall the superb talk on Edward I given to us by Marc Morris in 2009. We are delighted he has agreed to return to speak about the subject of his new book on the Norman Conquest, which has been described as 'the definitive account for our times of an extraordinary story, a pivotal moment in the shaping of the English nation'.

### **Recent Meetings**

At the March meeting Jeremy Hodgkinson spoke about Cast-iron Firebacks. He opened by describing them as a 'bit of a mystery' but, helped by good illustrations and expert knowledge, by the end of his talk they were far less of a mystery. Wealden firebacks date back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century and one local smith, Richard Lenard of Brede, even used one to tell the story of his life.

To round off the season in April, Lee Ault gave us a very entertaining talk on the fashions and accessories popular in the 1920s and 30s, using many items from her own extensive collection – including dresses, hats, scarves and gloves – to show the differences in fashion between the two decades. This was preceded by the AGM.

# THS Visit to the new Kent History and Library Centre

Wednesday 19th September



This new purpose-built Centre in Maidstone opened in May. The building is designed to provide high standard long term storage facilities for Kent Archives as well as giving public access to the material. It has over 14 kilometres of

historic records dating back to 699 A.D. including manuscripts, charters, maps, prints and photographs. All the records from the East Kent Archives have been transferred plus some material from the Canterbury Cathedral Archive. The Centre has a community history area and an archive search room and library area. There is an online catalogue but it is not easy to use it to check the detail of what is held in the archive, but staff at the Centre can provide advice.

The Centre's website and catalogue can be reached via [www.kent.gov.uk/archives](http://www.kent.gov.uk/archives).

## Visit details

Pat Hopcroft has arranged for a group visit to the new Centre on Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> September at 11.00. Staff will show the group around the building and tell us about the collections stored there. Numbers are limited to 15 but a second visit can be arranged if there is demand. The mid-morning start is intended to allow group members to make their own way to Maidstone and meet at the Centre.

The Centre, which also houses Maidstone Library, is on James Whatman Way near Maidstone East station and there are 27 pay and display parking spaces.

**Booking is essential. Please call Pat Hopcroft (Kent History Federation Representative) on 01732-357293, giving name(s) and phone number.**

## Summer in Tonbridge – it could have been worse:

1763 – 19<sup>th</sup> August: Phenomenal storm of thunder, lightning and hail ... hop gardens, orchards and cornfields entirely destroyed and farm buildings blown down.

1831 – Daily thunderstorms for nearly a month and farm fires caused by lightning.

1874 – 11<sup>th</sup> August: Three inches of rain in two hours – a record up to then.

1903 – 19<sup>th</sup> July: Great thunderstorm and rain (2.81 inches). Railway station flooded. 23<sup>rd</sup> July: 3.1 inches, beating the 1874 record.

*From 'The Tonbridge of Yesterday' by A.H.Neve (1933)*

## Acquisition

The metal object shown here is about 18 inches long and bears the word 'Boeing'. It is one of the foot-pedals from the cockpit of a B-17 'Flying Fortress' bomber which came down in Starvecrow Wood, near the Shipbourne Road, on 25<sup>th</sup> February 1944. It has been donated to the Society by a Tonbridge resident who witnessed the crash.

The bomber was one of more than



500 B-17s from the US Army Air Force which took part in raids on aviation production sites in Germany that day. The plane got into difficulties on the return journey and the pilot was trying to reach an emergency landing strip at Penshurst when the plane came down in north Tonbridge. He lost his life in the crash but the other crew members baled out and survived.

## The History of the Slade

*Jacquie Wyatt writes:*

'A few years ago Pat Mortlock was kind enough to come and give our residents a history tour. British weather prevailed but around 10% of residents braved the howling gale and were inspired. The Slade Area Residents' Association (SARA) has been fascinated by the history of our unique area ever since and asked local residents to share their recollections.'

'We've now been awarded a small Community Enhancement Fund Grant (valid until October) and can publish a paperback book. We've publicised the project via our own newsletters and AGM, the Slade school fete plus a couple of mentions in the Courier and posters in every venue that would take them. Twenty-eight people

who lived in or knew the Slade have contributed their memories to date – a couple from the 1920s – and we have some personal photos that have never been widely shared before.'

We are lucky that both Frank Tullett and Maureen McLeod are sharing their expertise but any additional assistance

is always welcome. We're also keen to find any documents or photos of the area – it includes the Cattle Market (the original town market near the Castle was probably near by), Bank Street (Chapel, the old workhouse and subsequent National



*The Elliot family of Houselands Road in 1901*

School), Castle Street, the Slade (Slade School and the old Electricity works), Stafford Road, Fosse Road (and part of the Fosse), Lodge Road, Houselands Road, Hawden Road (Slade Cottage),

Havelock Road and Lansdowne Road, formerly Knox Lane (the back of Fosse Bank School, a Church and, at one point, Whitefriars Social Club). Beeching, Knox and Annison have owned the area at various points and Arthur Neve lived in Lansdowne Road

at one time.'

'If you have material you could share, know anyone who could contribute or just want to have a look please get in touch.'

## A Loyal Address

In 1897 Tonbridge people celebrated the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria, as we did this year for the present Queen. Unfortunately the *Tonbridge Free Press* records for 1897 are missing so it has not been possible to report how that Jubilee was celebrated in the town. However we know from the Minute Book of the Urban District Council, kept in Tonbridge Reference Library, that the following Loyal Address was composed (in suitably grandiose prose) and despatched to Her Majesty:

### *To her Most Gracious Majesty Queen Victoria*

*May it please your Majesty,*

*We the Urban District Council of Tonbridge in the County of Kent, desire most dutifully and respectfully to join in the universal expressions of loyal congratulations which are being tendered from every part of your Majesty's wide dominions.*

*The auspicious Anniversary about to be celebrated affords opportunity for the outward manifestation of that affection and loyalty towards your Majesty's person and throne which is at all times so deeply felt and we, as the governing body of the ancient town of Tonbridge, and as voicing the unanimous sentiments of its inhabitants, are happy in the opportunity of approaching your Majesty with hearty felicitations on the completion of the sixtieth year of a Reign which will be celebrated in history not only for its length but for the blessings and glories which have attended your Majesty's rule.*

*We earnestly hope that your Majesty's life may long be spared to reign over a loyal and contented people.*

*2nd day of June 1897*

*Frank East, Chairman*

At the Council Meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> July the clerk reported that he had received a formal acknowledgement of the receipt of the Loyal Address by the Home Secretary.

70 years ago

## The Chichester Road bomb and its aftermath

On 16<sup>th</sup> December 1942 a Nazi bomber caused serious damage in Chichester Road and adjoining roads near the railway in South Tonbridge. Demolition and repairs to damaged buildings lasted at least through the first half of 1943. Details of the local response are found in the *Tonbridge Free Press* and the records of the Emergency Committee of the Tonbridge Urban District Council (a wartime committee).

Two houses were destroyed, six needed demolition, 66 were seriously damaged, no fewer than 558 slightly damaged and 163 more had broken windows. Neighbours with undamaged houses invited the new homeless in for Christmas.

Demolition was carried out by the Kent County Civil Defence Reserve brought in for the purpose. The Council used stocks of building supplies held back for emergencies and bought glass for repairs; according to the Chairman, H. R. Christie, in January some of the streets looked like 'builders' yards'. The Surveyor B. Bishop reported 132 men mainly from Tunbridge Wells at work on temporary repairs on 25 February. By 1 April 289 houses were completed with 99 men still working, and on 29 April 558 finished with 65 men still there; by 1 July it was all done.

Sadly three people were killed by the bomb, 14 injured and sent to hospital, and 21 slightly affected, a total of 38. However it might have been much worse in view of the serious damage.

WORLDVIEW OF THE

*Christopher Chalklin*

## Another Tonbridge Olympian

Almost a century before Kelly Holmes' 2004 triumph, a Tonbridge-born man took part in one of the more curious sports ever included in the Olympics – motorboat racing. He was John Marshall Gorham, son of the well-known Tonbridge GP, Dr John Gorham, and an engineer by profession. His motorboat was called *Quicksilver*.

The 1908 Games took place in London, with the water events on Southampton Water. Gorham's race, on 28<sup>th</sup> August, was a fiasco. Violent rainstorms and a near gale force wind meant that only two boats appeared at the starting line, and only one of those completed the course. *Quicksilver* had shipped so much water that she had to drop out, forfeiting the certainty of gaining at least a silver medal by completing the course. Gorham's crew on this occasion was his wife, something which *The Times* regarded as 'worthy of special remark as an example of feminine endurance'. This was the first and only occasion that motorboat racing was admitted as an Olympic event.

## We need your help

- We are looking for a few more people to join the team who take turns in setting up the projection and sound equipment at the start of our lectures in the Angel Centre. If you think you might sometimes be able to help, please speak to a member of the Committee. Training will of course be provided.

## New History Courses in Tonbridge

### Kent Adult Education Courses

At the AEC, Avebury Avenue. Brochure from the Library or the AEC:

*Family History*: 10 sessions from 11<sup>th</sup> January 2013, 7.30 -9.30

One day Saturday Courses, 10-3

*Researching Local History*, 6<sup>th</sup> October

*Life and Work in The Weald*, 8<sup>th</sup> December

*Place Names of The Weald*, 26<sup>th</sup> January

*Life in Roman Kent*, 9<sup>th</sup> February

*Life After Rome*, 16<sup>th</sup> February

*Domesday Kent*, 16<sup>th</sup> March

*Life in Norman Kent*, 20<sup>th</sup> April

### WEA Courses

At Tonbridge Bowling Club, off Darent Avenue, Tonbridge Farm Sportsground:

*Exploring Britain's Heritage*: 10 sessions from 2<sup>nd</sup> October, 10.15-12.15

*River Thames part 1*: 5 sessions from 15<sup>th</sup> January, 10-12

*Industrial Architecture*: 5 sessions from 26<sup>th</sup> February, 10 - 12

At the Angel Centre:

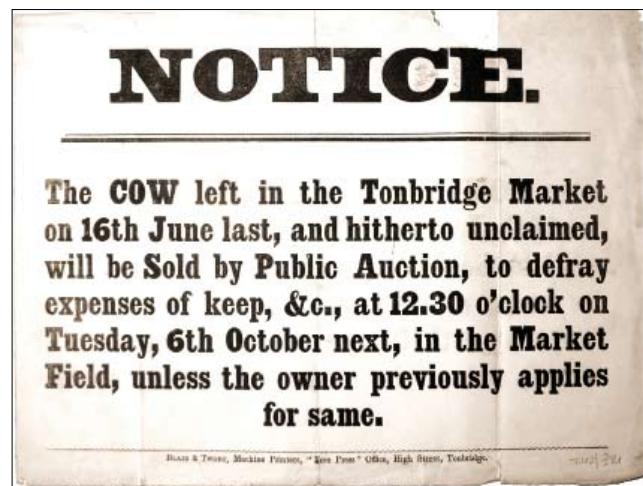
*History and Current International Events*: 10 sessions from 9<sup>th</sup> January, 2 - 4

At St Stephen's church:

*History of Art: Six Italian Cities*. 6 sessions from 14<sup>th</sup> January, 10-12

Full details about all WEA courses available from Tonbridge Library or Jill Britcher

## From the Archives



We do not know if the cow was claimed.