



TONBRIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Above: Pupils from the Wesleyan School in Barden Road are ready for battle in a scene from a pageant staged in 1909. One carries the de Clare shield, the other a crossbow. The photo is from the THS Pictorial Records collection – see pages 4-5.

Society News

Tonbridge Historical Society

Founded: 1960

President – Joy Debney

Past Presidents – Stella Hardy MBE,
Dr Christopher Chalklin

Committee

Chairman – George Buswell

Vice Chairman and Website
– Anthony Wilson

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

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

Minutes & Archives – Sally Robbins

Publicity – Vanessa King

Audio-visual Officer – Deborah Cole

Social Events – Jenny Poxon

Other Committee Members:

Roger Barham

Pam Sharland

Co-opted Members:

Shiela Broomfield (*Archaeology*)

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

website: www.tonbridgehistory.org.uk

Subscription: £9 per person (£3 for under-18s), due on 1st March annually for the following season.

Non-members are welcome as guests at all meetings on payment of £3 at the door (£1 for under-18s).

From the Chairman

Tonbridge has always had to cope with the risk of flooding but this winter's weather has been extreme, with the wettest January on record, and it is still raining as I write this in early February. I hope by the time you read this, there is drier weather and hopefully even some sunshine!

A piece of more positive news is that the Angel Centre which was due to close at the end of this year as part of the town redevelopment is now taking bookings for 2015 which means that we can continue to hold our meetings there until any redevelopment is confirmed.

I look forward to seeing you at the AGM on April 24th.

George Buswell

From the Treasurer

Subscriptions: reluctantly the time has come when the Society must raise its annual subscription, for the first time in 14 years. The increase, from £7 to £9 per person, is in response to increasing costs for room hire and postage, and to enable us to pay increasing fees and expenses if we are to continue to attract good speakers.

Our reserve deposit account is diminishing due to low interest rates and our fallback position is weaker than it was.

Pat Mortlock

AGM

The Society's 2014 Annual General Meeting will take place on Thursday, 24th April at 7.30pm in the Riverside Room at the Angel Centre. Details are on a separate sheet distributed with this newsletter.

Recent Meetings

The new season of talks began in September with an entertaining talk from Patsy Erskine-Hill about polite (and not so polite) Georgian society in the 18th century. She revealed that Jane Austen's aunt was arrested and jailed for shoplifting in Canterbury (but released after social pressure) and Thomas Coke, 1st Earl of Leicester, locked up his wife (who had brought a vast fortune to the marriage) on their estate. He died three years later and Lady Mary lived for another 30 years, but never remarried. The speaker also described the emergence of coffee houses, of which there were 55 in London by 1739.

In October Professor Jackie Eales from Canterbury Christ Church University gave a very informative talk

on events in Kent during the English Civil War, 1642-49, including an account of the fighting in Tonbridge in 1643 and the battle at Hilden Bridge in July that year. [More about this on THS website: www.tonbridgehistory.org.uk/events/civil-war.html]

The November two-talk session saw Julian Bowsher, from Museum of London Archaeology, firstly going through the development of playhouses in London from 1570 to 1650), illustrated by archaeological evidence. This included the two Globe Theatres, of which the first built in 1599 burned down in 1613. After enjoying the excellent cakes and scones, members then heard about the different acting companies and how they operated.

At our December meeting Geoff Hutchinson gave a lively talk on the History of Comic Verse from 1066 to the Internet, beginning with a comic monologue about the Battle of Hastings and including medieval castles and Henry VIII's wives.

In February our chairman and his wife related the remarkable story of a German soldier who spent three years as a prisoner-of-war based in Tonbridge during and after the Second World War. This was based on the fascinating and at times moving account he recorded in his diary, whose context George had researched and Joyce had deciphered and translated – no mean feat.

[The translation of the diary is also on the THS website: www.tonbridgehistory.org.uk/archives/war-diary.html]

PHOTOS

Do you have recent pictures of Tonbridge – perhaps the latest flooding or Christmas events, which you are willing to donate to the Society's collection? The addition of new material is essential if we are to provide a comprehensive record for the future.

The Society holds an impressive archive of early photographs of Tonbridge. A few samples are shown on these pages.

Pictures taken before the 1950s can be seen on our website (www.tonbridgehistory.org.uk/pictures) but these are less than half the total held by the Society.

The photographs are of great value to local historians as they reveal both the dramatic and

Anticlockwise from top left:

Filling up an 1899 Benz car at Caffyn's
Kent score 803 for 4 to beat Essex in 1934

A Southern Railway signalman in the 1920s
Celebrating the Silver Jubilee of George Vth



WANTED

the subtle changes to the townscape during the last 150 years.

The group responsible for looking after these photographs meet for a couple of hours each month to file and index them. I would like members to be able to view this record, and to encourage additional support at our early evening meetings on a Thursday in the Reference Library.

I am happy to be contacted about the collection and arrange a visit if there is a demand.

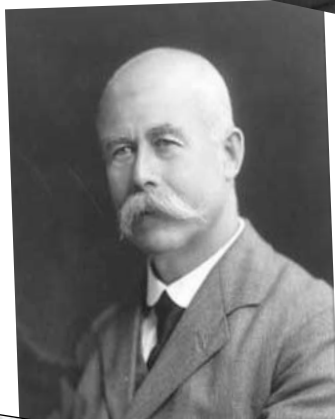
Pat Hopcroft

Parish Church Infants class in 1929

A family in their garden in Shipbourne Road

'Gaffer' Stacey, first headmaster of Slade School

Organist Arthur Hayler at the Capitol Cinema



Acquisitions

The Society has received a generous donation from Mr Don Skinner of a number of items of Tunbridge Ware. Some of them, such as the unusual thermometer shown below, were made at Wise's Manufactory in Tonbridge.

At least five Tunbridge Ware manufacturers are known to have been active in our town, among whom the Wise family stand pre-eminent. No other family had a longer history in the business, through four generations from George Wise in 1746 to another George who closed the business 130 years later.

The Wises' factory – once the only building in Tonbridge worthy of that title, but known originally as the 'Manufactory' – stood on the eastern side of the High Street at the north end of the Great Bridge. It consisted of workshops, yards, five houses and a garden, and had its own landing-stage on the river for bringing in supplies. In 1784 the Wises described

themselves as 'turners, chair-makers, dealers in medicines, Tunbridge Ware, haberdasheries, cutlery, silver and divers other wares', but Tunbridge Ware eventually became their main line of business, together with a printing press to produce the engravings of local sights which adorned some of their products. A retail outlet was established in Tunbridge Wells in the 1830s.

In 1851 George Wise's business was the only one still making Tunbridge Ware in Tonbridge, employing just nine men, and that would finally close in 1876. The factory building was finally demolished in 1886 when the approach to the bridge was widened.

Mr Skinner's donation also includes some original prints produced by the Wises, including the one reproduced below which shows the Wise factory as it was prior to 1818.

Tunbridge Ware manufacture continued in Tunbridge Wells until the early years of the 20th century.



Obituaries

We are saddened to report the deaths in recent months of three people who supported and served our Society over many years. THS was represented at memorial events for all three.

Joan Thirsk, CBE, FBA did us the honour of serving as our President from 1997 to 2004, and also gave us a number of talks over the years. She was an extremely distinguished professional historian in the field of social and economic history, and particularly of the history of agriculture, and held posts at Leicester University and also at Oxford where she was Reader in Economic History. She and her husband – whom she met when both were working at Bletchley Park in the Second World War – retired to Hadlow in 1983, making their home in the Castle (not in the Tower itself).



She believed strongly in the importance of local history, and was the leader of a group of Hadlow people, including some THS members, who produced in 2007 the book *Hadlow, life land and people in a Wealden parish 1460-1600* based on a mediaeval document. This must rate by any standard as one of the most remarkable works of local history produced in recent years – scholarly, but also humane and readable, and of considerable interest to Tonbridge people although its main focus is Hadlow.

Joan Thirsk has been described as a person of lively intelligence, warmth and generosity. She died on 3rd October 2013 at the age of 91.

George Young was a well-known and much respected figure in the town, particularly for the roles he played, on stage and off, at the Oast Theatre. He was a long-standing member of our society, a committee member, and chairman from 1995-97. It was during his tenure as chairman that the Society played host to the annual meeting of the Kent History Federation, an event which George masterminded with vigour and efficiency. He was a man of many talents, remembered for his personal warmth and humour.

George Young died on 23rd December, a few days after he was knocked down by a car which had apparently mounted the pavement a few yards from his home in Dry Hill Road.

John Boulding was a founder member of THS, elected to the committee at the inaugural meeting on 4th February 1960. He was an active and enthusiastic member in the early years, and kept in touch after moving to live and work in London. When he later returned to Tonbridge he again became a regular attendee at our meetings and on visits, and was again elected to the committee. An accountant by profession, he was a meticulous 'Examiner' of the Society's accounts for many years. He also wrote a report of every meeting for the *Courier*, until the paper dropped its Society News section a few years ago.

John was present at the two-session meeting last November, but died from complications of leukaemia on 2nd January.

Here and there

Forthcoming History courses in Tonbridge:

W.E.A. Course (Contact: Rosemary Walker)

Day school: *People, Politics and Power*:
Saturday 7th June

Kent Adult Education Courses

(Details from A.E. Centre, Avebury Avenue or www.kentadulteducation.co.uk)

Saturday Day Courses:

Life and Work in the Weald: 15th March

Latin for Historians: 2 sessions - 17th
and 24th May

*Discover the Timber Framed Buildings
of The Weald*: 2 sessions - 7th and 14th
June

*Magnificence and Display in the Tudor
Court*: 28th June

Discover Ten Top Tonbridge Buildings:
5th July

Parish Church Archives

Tonbridge Parish Church archives, housed in the West Gallery, are open most Monday mornings between 10 and 12. Please contact the Archivist, Peter Burgess, if you plan a visit. The archive includes Parish Magazines from 1891 to 2008 (with gaps), and much else.

‘A wallaby which had been living wild in the Tonbridge area for the past month was captured yesterday by a party of police.’ *The Times*, 18/9/1943

Furniture Van

The attractive advertisement shown below was recently sent in to the Secretary. Thomas Day is listed as an auctioneer in the 1881 census.

News item – 1943

