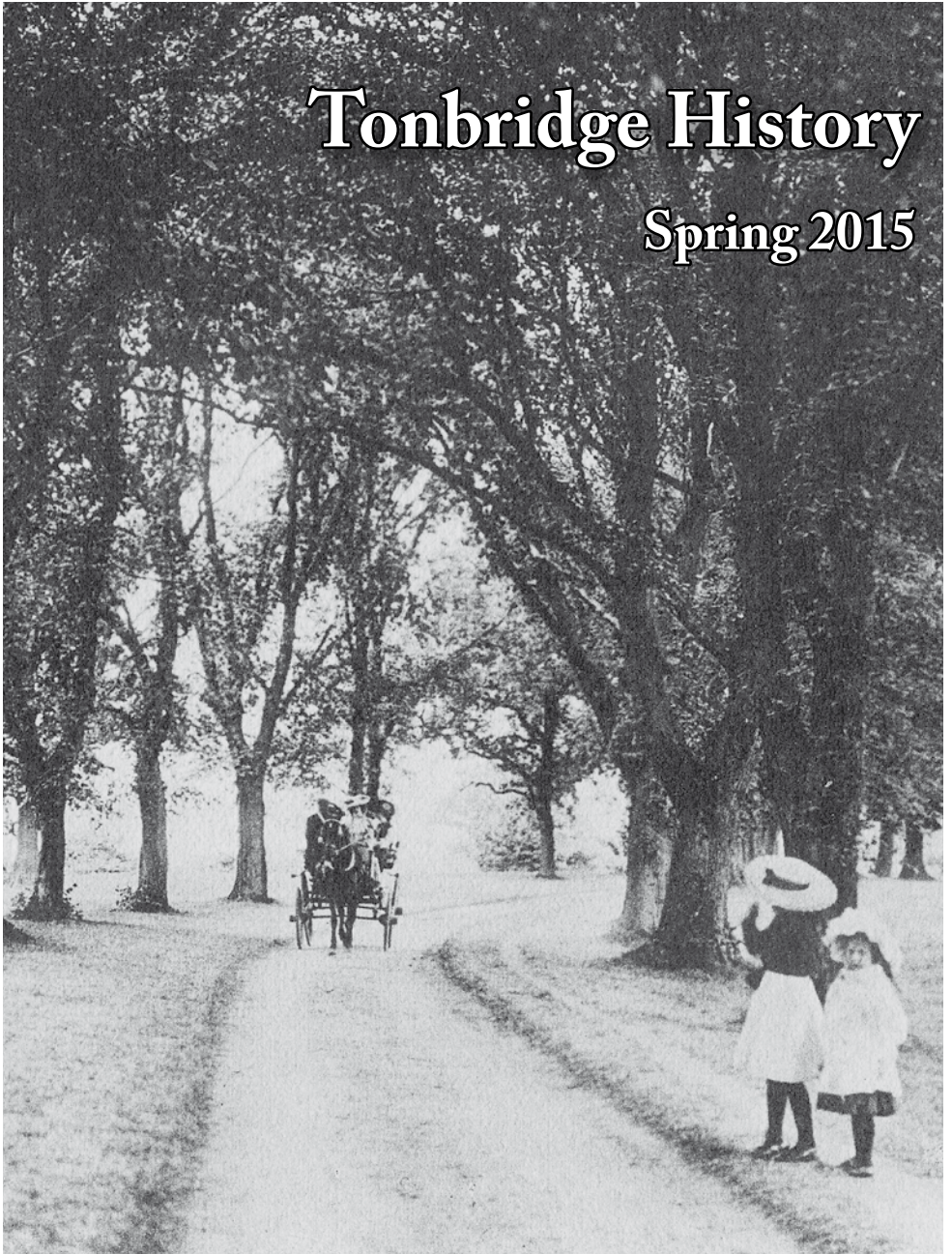


# Tonbridge History

Spring 2015



## TONBRIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

*Above: Photo from a booklet 'Picturesque views of Tonbridge' published in about 1911. It shows a location in the town that was built over after the First World War, but where was it? See page 8.*

# Society News

## Tonbridge Historical Society

Founded: 1960

President – Joy Debney

*Past President* – Christopher Chalklin

### Committee

*Chairman* – George Buswell

*Vice Chairman and Website*  
– Anthony Wilson

*Secretary* – Madge Woods,

*Treasurer* – Pat Mortlock,

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

*Subscription:* £9 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 £3 at the door (under-18s free).

## From the Chairman

There is a feature elsewhere in this Newsletter about the Society's new publication – *Tonbridge through ten centuries*. When my wife and I moved to Tonbridge nine years ago we were surprised to find that there was no book in print telling the story of Tonbridge's history. I feel sure that the new book will fill this gap – and obviously hope that many of you will agree with us and buy it!

We are also close to the AGM (see below), and as usual would welcome contact from any member interested in becoming more involved in the running of our Society. This could be by joining the Committee itself which meets 5 times a year on Thursday evenings in the Angel Centre, or by becoming involved in one of the Society's specialist activities, which are run by members of the Committee – perhaps helping with the Society website, with the archives (stored at Castle Lodge in Castle Street), with the Pictorial Records Group, with publicity, or at social events or with the Society's technical equipment used at lectures.

If you are interested and would like to know more please contact me or any member of the Committee. Don't be bashful! – helping to run the Society is a good way to find out more about Tonbridge, past and present.

*George Buswell*

## AGM

The Society's 2015 Annual General Meeting will take place on Thursday, 16<sup>th</sup> April at 7.30pm in the Riverside Room at the Angel Centre. Details are distributed with this Newsletter.

at Caerphilly Castle (also a de Clare possession) and described the various defences such as 'murder holes' and a huge portcullis.

Nearly 100 members attended the double meeting in November to hear fascinating talks from two speakers, both involved in the ongoing archaeological investigations at Knole. The first, by Natalie Cohen, looked at discoveries made during work on the building and in particular described a series of marks found in the King's Room which could be dated to the building of the room in about 1605. These were identified as 'witch marks' and were supposed to provide protection against demons, reflecting the attitudes of that period. The second talk by Matt Champion looked specifically at what could be learnt from graffiti found in many places at Knole. He tracked one of the servants 'Eileen' across various rooms covering a period from the early 1930s to 1945 and he even found a sketch of her. There were also frequent references to weather conditions, particularly snow.

In December Bob Appleton gave an amusing and well-illustrated talk about the building and operation of the Millennium Wheel (now the London Eye) which turns at 0.5 mph and takes 30 minutes to complete a circuit. He also outlined the history of the development of these large 'Ferris Wheels' beginning with the first one built in 1893 for the Chicago Expo and one in London at Earls Court which carried 2.5 million passengers between 1903 and 1907.

## Recent Meetings

In September Richard Filmer opened the new programme of talks by looking at Traditional Kentish Building Materials (a change from the advertised 'Kentish Trades, Crafts & Industries' due to a duplication with the Civic Society). He covered a range of materials including wood, with the example of the superb chestnut roof at Penshurst Place, and Kentish ragstone, used to build the Tower of London and Knole, the largest domestic house in England, and even the production of 7,000 cannon balls for Henry VIII's navy.

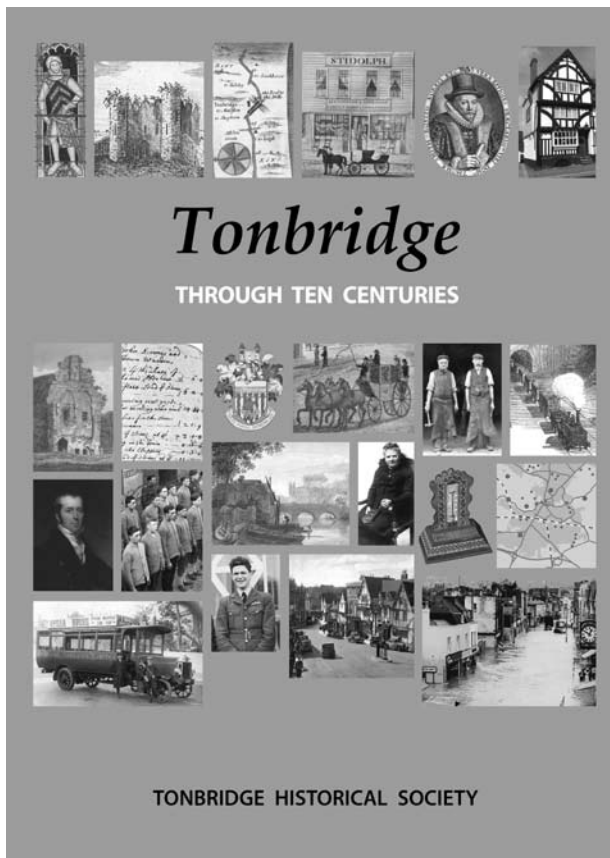
In October David Martin provided a detailed examination of Tonbridge Castle Gatehouse based on his involvement in the restoration work. He showed the links to a similar Gatehouse

## At last – a new history of our town!

Our new book *Tonbridge through ten centuries*, published by THS on 27<sup>th</sup> February, is available to members of the Historical Society at a special introductory price of only £8 for copies purchased before 17<sup>th</sup> April 2015. The full price will be £9.50

The 240-page book is the result of three years' work by THS members George Buswell, Deborah Cole, Pat Hopcroft, Pat Mortlock, Anthony Wilson (editor) and Margaret Wilson, drawing on their combined experience in teaching, writing, lecturing and historical research. The text is supported by 300 colour and monochrome illustrations, many of which come from our Society's extensive pictorial and archive collections.

In his Foreword to *Tonbridge through ten centuries*, Sir John Stanley commends its 'admirably readable text and fascinating photographs' which 'will appeal, and be of value, to every age-group in our community from school-children to the elderly'.



## About the book

In the eleventh century, Tonbridge was a tiny settlement. By the end of the twentieth it was home to more than 30,000 people. *Tonbridge through ten centuries* explores the history of that remarkable transformation, as a compact castle-centred community grew into a substantial town in the course of ten centuries.

Among the topics covered are:

- the way the town's role has evolved: first an adjunct of the mighty castle, then a market centre for surrounding farms and villages, and eventually a 'dormitory town' much influenced by its proximity to London
- the events, local and national, which influenced and sometimes disrupted local lives: feuding nobles, religious upheaval, rebellions and Civil War, disease and poverty, the two World Wars, and the enduring problem of flooding
- the innovations in transport which brought new links to the outside world and stimulated commerce:

the canalizing of the Medway, the creation of turnpikes, the coming of the railway, and the construction of new roads

- the people and personalities who, individually and collectively, made a difference: the castle-building de Clares, the influential landowners, Georgian gentry, Victorian worthies and a number of notable writers, artists, scientists, sportsmen and war heroes
- the changing layout and appearance of the town, with its mediaeval castle, church and fosse, its surviving timber-framed buildings, and the many later churches, schools, public buildings and housing estates we see today.

## Fun and games at the Michaelmas Fair in 1797 »»»

The handbill reproduced opposite comes from the Sprange Collection held by Tunbridge Wells Museum & Art Gallery, and has kindly been sent to us by Chris Jones of Tunbridge Wells Local History Group.

At a time when Tonbridge had no printer of its own, Jasper Sprange (1746-1823) was active as 'printer, bookseller, bookbinder and stationer,

at his circulating library, Post-Office, Tunbridge-Wells'. Four proofs by Sprange are on display at the exhibition *Material Obsessions: British Folk Art*, running at Tunbridge Wells Museum & Art Gallery from 16<sup>th</sup> January to 31<sup>st</sup> May 2015. Associated events include a talk about the eccentric artist from Frant, George Smart, on 15<sup>th</sup> April. Details: [www.tunbridgewellsmuseum.org](http://www.tunbridgewellsmuseum.org).

## 70 years ago – VE day

### 'DANCING IN THE STREETS FOLLOWS THANKSGIVING'

*70 years ago, on Tuesday May 8<sup>th</sup> 1945, Britain marked the ending of the Second World War in Europe with celebrations in cities, towns and villages across the country.*

From the *Tonbridge Free Press*, 11<sup>th</sup> May 1945:

'Joyous crowds with linked arms marching up the High Street behind impromptu bands, beneath the shining lights that we have not seen for over five years, was the culmination of Tonbridge's VE-Day celebration ...

Tuesday morning was given over to thanksgiving. Crowded services were held at St. Stephen's, at the Congregational Church and at the Methodist Church. The Parish Church and St. Saviour's Church held their services, which were just as well attended, at 6 p.m., an hour before the United Service of Thanksgiving on the Castle Lawn. Meanwhile the town literally burst into red, white and blue and long laid plans for street parties

were put into operation.

After the service on the Castle Lawn, attended by nearly 4,000 people, things really began to hum. Public houses, cafés, hotels and licensed clubs were crowded to overflowing and old and young danced on the Castle Lawn beneath the shadow of the ancient walls with the floodlit castle standing out like a beacon to mark the overthrow of darkness.

When the lights suddenly blinked out again just after 1 a.m. and plunged the town once more into the darkness to which we have become accustomed, revellers went sleepily but happily home with a feeling that a chapter of history had passed.'

# Annual Diversions AT TONBRIDGE,

*On Wednesday, October 11, 1797,  
(Being the Day after Old Michaelmas-Day.)*

FARMERS and Others attending, will find it convenient for Hiring of SERVANTS.

---

The following ARTICLES will be given *gratis*:

Men to smoke for a *Pound of Tobacco*. Each to smoke three Pipes.

---

Four Boys to eat Apples out of a Pail of Water for a *HAT*, value 5s.

---

Men to grin through a Horse Collar for a *Flannel Jacket*.

---

Young Women to run for a *Pair of Shoes*.

---

An Ass Race for a *Cheefe*.

\*.\* The hindermost Ass to win the Cheefe, but the Owners are not allowed to ride their own Asses.

---

A LEATHER JACKET to be run for, by Labouring Men.

\*.\* No Man to start under 30 Years of Age.

---

A *Round Frock* to be Woo'd for, by Carters.

---



## Here and there

### Forthcoming History courses in Tonbridge:

**W.E.A. Courses** (Contact: Rosemary Walker, 01732 366346)

*Exploring Historic Buildings:* 6 sessions  
Mondays April 13<sup>th</sup> – 1<sup>st</sup> June, 10.30 – 12.30

*People, Politics and Power:* Day Course  
Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> June, 10.30 – 15.30

Both at Tonbridge Methodist Church, Higham Lane.

### Kent Adult Education Courses

(Details from Adult Education Centre, Avebury Avenue or [www.kentadulteducation.co.uk](http://www.kentadulteducation.co.uk))

*A History of Everyday Life in Mediaeval London:* 10 weeks from Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> April, 19.15–21.15

*The Historic Architecture of Tonbridge – Guided Tour:* Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> May, 10.00 – 13.00.

### Epitaph to a drinker in Tonbridge churchyard

*‘Hail!*

*This stone marks the spot  
Where a notorious sot / Doth lie;*

*Whether at rest or not*

*It matters not / To you or I.*

*Oft to the ‘Lion’ he went to fill his horn,  
Now to the ‘Grave’ he’s gone to get it warm.*

Beered by public subscription by his hale  
and stout companions, who deeply lament  
his absence.’

From *Curious Epitaphs* by William Andrews, 1899.

### Election Fever

We do not anticipate any rioting in Tonbridge on May 7<sup>th</sup> this year, but it has not always been so. On Election Day in 1880 crowds gathered outside the Rose & Crown, eggs and flour were thrown, windows were broken and the Chief Constable of Kent had to attend with 94 members of his force. See page 127 of *Tonbridge through ten centuries* for further details.



#### **Front cover photo**

*The picture on page 1 shows the avenue in the grounds of Barden Park House, near where Audley Avenue is today.*

*The winning candidate is carried through the town in 1910.*



THS Newsletter is compiled by George Buswell and Anthony Wilson. Contributions are welcomed and should be sent to THS, 7 The Ridgeway, Tonbridge TN10 4NQ. The deadline for the next issue is July 15th.