



Now you see it ... now you don't. Three views showing the Angel Corner (where Vale Road meets the High Street), at differing dates. The former Congregational Church is in the background of all three views. The photographs are from the Warner Collection – see page 5.

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,

Archives – Sally Robbins

Minutes – Pam Sharland

Publicity – Vanessa King

Audio-visual Officer – Deborah Cole

Other Committee Members:

Roger Barham

Pam Boorman

Jackie Davies

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 (£3.00 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 (under-18s free).

From the Chairman

Tonbridge through Ten Centuries continues to sell steadily in the town and through Amazon, with sales now into the second reprint.

A new initiative to use the book with local schools has been put forward by Toby Butler, Chairman of Tonbridge Round Table, in conjunction with the Society, and a pilot project using a class-size set of the books has been run with the Slade Primary School. The Round Table has generously offered to back financially a plan to make the book accessible to all Tonbridge schools (particularly primary) and it is hoped that this will begin later this year.

George Buswell

AGM

The Society's 2016 Annual General Meeting will take place on Thursday, 14th April at 7.30pm in the Riverside Room at the Angel Centre. Details are distributed with this *Newsletter*.

Recent Meetings

Our new season's programme opened in **September** with a talk by Peter Tann about Magna Carta, marking 800 years since it was first issued in 1215. He outlined the trouble King John had with both the Pope and the barons causing him eventually to agree to the issuing of Magna Carta. The speaker then looked at further developments with regard to the charter in the 13th century with a connection to Kent and the Cinque Ports, including a reissue of the charter in 1300 involving Faversham and Sandwich.

In **October** Amy Dimmock spoke about the Huguenots (French Protestants) and their involvement in Kent – linked to a new museum about the Huguenots which opened in Rochester in the summer of 2015. She explained how the persecution of Protestants in 16th and 17th century France led to many of them coming to England (particularly Kent and London) and their importance in developments in clothmaking. Amy described the work of James Le Main, a Huguenot silk designer in Canterbury – home to one third of all Huguenots in Kent – and she also brought with her artefacts relating to the silk trade which members could examine after the talk.

In **November** we welcomed back Imogen Corrigan for the two-session meeting and enjoyed talks on two aspects of mediaeval life. The first looked at how mediaeval art can reveal what life was like in that period, ranging from formal sculptures to rough graffiti and wood carvings, roof

bosses, wall paintings and mediaeval stained glass. She also looked at the carvings on misericords (the underside of folding seats in churches) including some which show wives beating their husbands!

After the interval and the usual enjoyable tea, cakes and scones (thanks to everyone who brought cakes) Imogen talked about 'The Politeness of Princes' where she examined the reality of manners and etiquette in the later mediaeval period. She quoted from mediaeval 'courtesie' books to show how there was an elaborate system of rules for mediaeval dining (for the rich). She explained the origin of the phrase 'below the salt' since the nobility at high table had access to salt – an expensive item in mediaeval times – whereas the less important guests sat at lower tables and were therefore below the salt and could not use it.

Our speaker for the **December** meeting was unfortunately unable to attend, so Anthony Wilson stepped in with a talk entitled 'An Engineer at the Great Exhibition'. The Crystal Palace in which the 1851 Exhibition took place was itself a feat of engineering. Among the 100,000 exhibits inside, those of special interest to an engineer included models of docks and bridges, a selection of locomotives and other enormous machines, a complete factory working by steam to spin and weave cloth, some of the first mass produced items (revolvers from America), and looms programmable by means of punched cards.

Help us open a window on mediaeval Tonbridge

Tonbridge Castle had its greatest impact on the town from its Norman origins to the 15th century, during which time it was inhabited by one of the highest ranking baronial families in England, the Clare family. Not only did they have a very colourful history themselves but their presence in the town brought a flurry of activity in the area.

The church, priory, houses, mills and town defences were constructed and later repaired. There were peaceful royal visits, probably including jousting tournaments and hunting but at other times revengeful attacks on the castle, kidnapping of family members and burning in the town.

The local people also have their story to tell in the many contemporary documents which still exist, some of which are digitally available. There are wills, rentals naming tenants and property, court rolls describing disputes and complaints and many more giving us glimpses of mediaeval life in Tonbridge. Place names and field

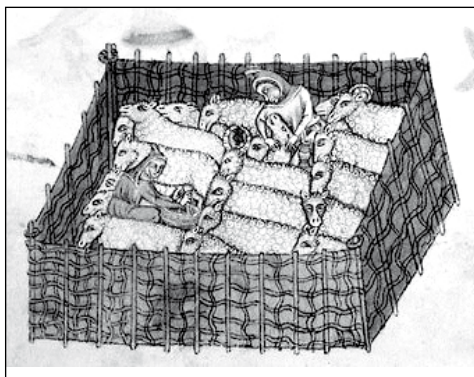
names often bear the names of their mediaeval owners or land uses.

The Historical Society would like to use these sources to tell the story of the people and places of mediaeval Tonbridge.

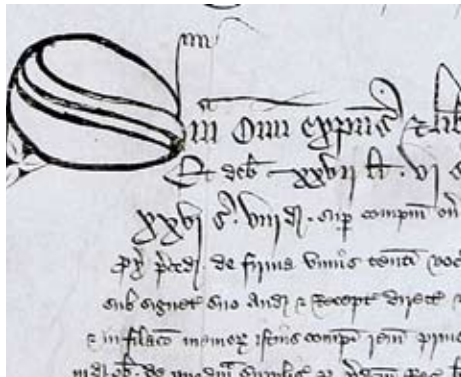
We would welcome anyone interested, to join us and help make sense of the original manuscripts, by transcribing (interpreting the old lettering for which help is available) and translating from Latin to English, where necessary. Other topics can be taken on to match the particular interests of members.

It is envisaged that the group will meet on a regular basis (perhaps monthly) and will aim towards a publication which will bring to light the people, their work, their houses and events during this formative period of the town's history.

If you are interested and would like to know more, please get in touch with any of the THS committee members at the next meeting.



Mediaeval life: a sheep pen, c.1330



Part of a 1438 rental relating to Tonbridge

Record History Now with a photo of your street

The Society's photographic record collection has over 8000 photographs recording and preserving Tonbridge's history for us in the present. We would like to have some photographs of the streets of Tonbridge *now* to leave for future members of the Society to either say they 'remember when it was like that' or maybe even 'hasn't it changed!'

If you would like to be involved, please just take a photo of your street for us. It can be in the warmer weather,

when something special is happening, or when there is no-one else about.

It really is your choice. You can send it to us using the Society's e-mail or you could print a copy and hand it to a THS committee member at one of our meetings.

Whatever you choose to do, please attach the name of the street, the date the photo was taken and your own name so we can add the information when your photo is put in the collection.



The Warner Collection

This view of Frank East's shop in December 1964 is one of 304 photographs of Tonbridge in the 1960s and 70s, kindly made available to the Society by Mr Bill Warner. They can

all be seen on our website: go to www.tonbridgehistory.org.uk and follow the link to 'Pictures 1963-80'. East's site is now occupied by The Pavilion and adjacent shops.





90 years ago The General Strike

In May 1926 Britain went through its first (and so far only) general strike, called by the Trades Union Congress in support of the coal miners in their dispute with the mine owners over pay and hours. Over 1.5 million workers took part including those in transport, docks, printing, gas and electricity, building, iron and steel (and coal miners). There was fighting between police and strikers in many cities and in Northumberland strikers derailed the *Flying Scotsman*. After eight days the TUC suddenly called the strike off leaving miners to struggle on their own and eventually return to work for less pay and longer hours.

On Tuesday May 11th 1926, with the general strike entering its second week, the Tonbridge Free Press managed to publish a special edition consisting of the single sheet shown above. It is printed on one side only and was sold for a penny.

The paper relays national news compiled, it says, from 'Wireless Messages by courtesy of Charles Baker and Co.' [One of the town's garages; presumably the Free Press did not have its own receiver.] It reports reassuringly that *'the 8th day of the strike finds the whole country quiet. The rapidly improvised transport facilities steadily extend. Railway men ... are drifting back to duty throughout Kent and Sussex.'*

The lead story in the section devoted to local news concerns the misfortunes of *'A Tonbridge Lady having an important engagement in London, [who] joined a small charabanc party. ... On the return they found themselves at the tail of a long procession of motor vehicles held up by a massed crowd in the Elephant and Castle region.'*

An overturned vehicle gave them an idea of what was in store for them when several men came up and with the remark,

'It's your turn next' ordered them to get out. There were many mounted police on the spot who were apparently helpless. Before the party had attempted to obey the order the vehicles in front got a move on at good speed, and the charabanc followed. It was a thrilling experience and shook up the nerves of one or two of the lady occupants very considerably.'

Another report tells how

'Mr. Alfred Smith the Tonbridge hair-dresser and tobacconist induced a motor driver to take him to the East End of London on Friday in the hope of getting a supply of tobacco. They reached the side street where the warehouse is situated but found it blocked, and they were ordered by the pickets to turn back.'

Smith tried to melt the hearts of the strikers by drawing a touching picture of their fellows in Tonbridge languishing and weakening in their sympathies for want of a cheering cigarette, but they refused to melt. He then told them one of his best and latest funny stories, but for the first time in his experience as a raconteur nobody laughed. He knew then that further effort was useless and metaphorically shook the dust of the East End from his tyres.'

Castle Hill brickworks

Preparations for dualling the A21 have allowed archaeologists to uncover and record the remains of an important brickworks lying beside the existing road on the right going up towards Castle Hill. Much more came to light than anyone expected.

This brickworks was mentioned in the Tithe survey of 1838 and appears on a number of early maps, but seems to have become overgrown and almost invisible in recent years. It was in operation for at least a century making a variety of bricks and tiles, one of a dozen or so brick and tile works operating in the Tonbridge area at various times. More recently it was partially dismantled and a piggery operated on the site.

It was hoped there might be an opportunity for local people to inspect the remains at Castle Hill which would then be reburied. Regrettably however the remains appear now to have been destroyed so that work on the road can proceed – another piece of Tonbridge history lost.

Hopefully we will be able to acquire a copy of the archaeologists' report on the brickworks for preservation in the Society's archives.



*Remains of part of the brickworks, photographed last November
Photo: Martin Garwood*



Workers at Castle Hill brickworks in 1889

Here and there

Forthcoming History courses in Tonbridge:

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

Tudors and Stuarts – History, Discovery and Innovation Tutor: David Carder. 6 weeks from Monday 4th April, 10.30 – 12.30

People, Politics and Power Tutor: Ronald Edwards. 5-hour day school Saturday 4th June, 10.30

Both at Tonbridge Methodist Church, Higham Lane.

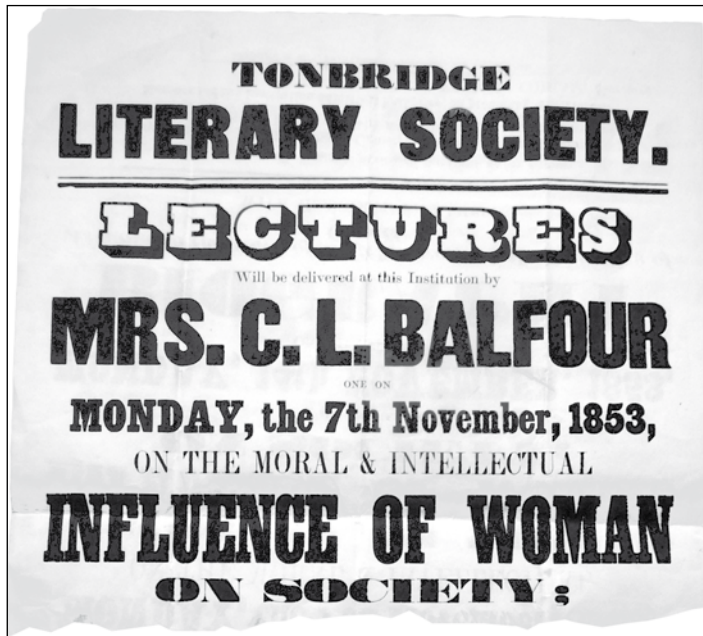
Kent Adult Education Courses (Details from Adult Education Centre, Avebury Avenue)

Everyday life in Tudor London: 10 weeks from 13th April, 19.15–21.15

Historic Buildings of Tonbridge: guided tour. Saturday 21st May, 10.00–12.30

In Search of the Wealden Hall House – Robertsbridge. Saturday 2nd July, 10.00 – 12.00

From the archives



Part of a poster in the Society's archive collection, advertising a public lecture in 1853.

The speaker was a temperance activist and a pioneering advocate for the advancement of women. Unusually for a woman at that time, she toured the country as a professional lecturer.

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.