

Tonbridge History

Autumn 2017



A recent addition to the THS photo collection - see page 7

Society News

Tonbridge Historical Society

Founded: 1960

President – to be appointed

Past President – Christopher Chalklin

Committee

Chairman & Archives – George Buswell

Vice-Chairman and Audio-visual Officer
– Deborah Cole

Secretary – Madge Woods,
e-mail: secretary@tonbridgehistory.org.uk

Treasurer – Pat Mortlock

Minutes – Pam Sharland

Website & Publications
– Anthony Wilson

Programme – Pam Boorman

Shiela Broomfield (*Archaeology*)

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

Sally Robbins

Roger Barham

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). Advance booking is required for the November meeting only.

From the Chairman

I hope you have all had a good summer and are ready to enjoy the new programme of talks – thanks to Madge Woods for her hard work in planning and organising them.

I spoke at the AGM in April about the amount of time planning the programme took and subsequently Pam Boorman has kindly volunteered to act as Programme Secretary for planning the 2018-19 programme, with some help from me.

My thanks to all members who have sent in suggestions for talks. This has been very helpful to Pam who has been working hard over the summer to organise speakers – please keep the suggestions coming.

George Buswell

Recent Meetings

In February Professor Jackie Eales spoke about ‘Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart Kent’, looking first at the wider historical pattern, with 40,000 executions for witchcraft across Europe between 1500 and 1800, and 500 in England (90% women). Jackie had studied the cases from the Kent Assize courts and of the 130 known cases only half were found guilty.

She also described the markings found in a room at Knole during the recent archaeological investigations, which had been prepared for a visit in 1606 by James I and are believed to be anti-witchcraft patterns.

Our speaker in March was Susan Pittman who spoke about 'Elizabethan and Jacobean Deer Parks in Kent'. She first looked at the general features of the 150 Deer Parks in Kent in this period and then in the second half of her talk she looked in detail at the four Deer Parks in Tonbridge – North and South Frith and two small ones, Cage Park and Postern Park. North Frith covered 3,000 acres and was still fenced in 1600. Susan took us on an illustrated tour round the seven mile park boundary, showing how modern place names link back to that period such as 'Trench' which meant a clearway through woodland.

In April, following the AGM, Deborah Cole and George Buswell looked at 'Aspects of Medieval Tonbridge' (a change from the advertised topic).

Deborah explained the background to the two medieval documents relating to Tonbridge which are currently being studied by the THS Research Group. One dates from 1324 and the other from 1428 and they have provided fascinating detail about the way Tonbridge Castle and its estates were run in the medieval period.

George then took us on a trip round medieval Tonbridge looking at what life was like at that time and also what can still be seen from that period in Tonbridge today, including remains of the Town bank and ditch – the Fosse – and buildings such as the Port Reeve's House, Blair House and the Chequers, which have their origins in the medieval period.

Lecture Programme 2017-18

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

Thursday 21st September, 7.45 pm

British Travellers at the Court of Tsars: Spies, Merchants & Adventurers

Patsy Erskine-Hill

Our speaker has degrees from Trinity College, Dublin and Edinburgh University. She travels widely and lectures on Russian, Italian and British history to groups including history societies and cruise passengers. She previously gave us a talk on 'The Georgians'.

Thursday 12th October, 7.45 pm

Well I never knew that! A tour through the Darent Villages from Westerham to Dartford

Rod Shelton

The speaker lives in Otford and previously worked in the feature film industry. His concern for the conservation and protection of the Darent Valley led him into an interest in local history and the stories of the villages, resulting in a 300-page book, Darent, which became a best-seller. He is also a model-builder, creating museum quality models of the Darent's famous sites when in their prime. His 'Eynsford Castle in 1150' is currently on show at the Sevenoaks Museum, and 'Otford Palace in 1520' is on permanent exhibition at the Otford Heritage Centre. He is active in local conservation projects including the protection of Otford's Archbishop's Palace and the recent discovery of a new Roman villa site in Otford.

Saturday 11th November, 2.30 pm

Two-session meeting with tea. Booking is essential for this meeting – a form with details of charges is available from the secretary.

Bronze Age Wood and Iron Age Stone: Prehistoric discoveries on Kent's Channel Coast

Dr Andrew Richardson

The talks will centre on the Bronze Age boat found at Dover in 1992, and the adventures with building a half scale replica of it. The excavation of this prehistoric wooden boat – at 3000 years old probably the oldest seagoing boat found anywhere – was an internationally important archaeological discovery. The speaker will also outline recent discoveries made at Folkestone.

Since May 2007 Dr Richardson has been in charge of public engagement, education and partnership projects for Canterbury Archaeological Trust, having previously completed a Ph D on Anglo-Saxon cemeteries in Kent. In his spare time he assists Kent police with tackling heritage-related crime. He has also been involved in projects with military veterans, where archaeology is used as a form of therapy.

Thursday 14th December, 7.45 pm

Ships, Clocks and Stars: the quest for longitude

Dr Rebekah Higgitt

The speaker is a historian of science working mainly on 18th and 19th century Britain, particularly the history of astronomy and navigation. She was previously Curator of History of Science at the Royal Observatory Greenwich and National Maritime Museum.

Thursday 8th February 2018, 7.45 pm

The Heritage and Memory of Hop Picking in West Kent

Dr Toby Butler

The speaker is a local resident and history lecturer at the University of East London, and with his students has explored the remains of the hop picking industry around West Kent. In this talk he will discuss his work bringing groups of ex-pickers down from East London to revisit the farms and record their memories, and his ideas for how the area might better utilise the heritage of local hop picking and beer making. The talk will include the screening of a documentary film screening shot at nearby farms in Five Oak Green.

Thursday 8th March 2018, 7.45 pm

The Plague Doctor of Kent: how a 17th century Wealden doctor confronted a lethal disease

Alex Ferris

The speaker is Chairman of Smarden Local History Society and speaks on a variety of historical subjects, all of which have come to light as the result of research carried out by the Society at its Heritage Centre in recent years.

Thursday 12th April 2018, 7.30pm

AGM followed by

The Armistice, Before and After

Geoff Vines

The speaker has researched and visited WW1 battlefields for over 30 years, collecting militaria from around the areas and finding out about the war above and below ground.

Joy Debney

Joy Debney, Founder member and recently President of our society, died on 22nd March. Pat Mortlock writes:

‘Many of you will have known Joy as our President but may never have asked yourselves why that should be so, or what her qualifications were for the post. In fact few people could have been better suited to the office.

Joy was a founder member of Tonbridge Historical Society in 1960. At that time she had already been teaching History at Tonbridge Girls Grammar School for six years; she continued to teach there until 1991. Generations of girls remember her with affection, a statement well supported by the numbers of old girls and staff who attended her Memorial Service in the Parish Church in April.

Joy kept up to date with ideas and research through her membership of the Historical Association and was a very enthusiastic participant in the summer courses and trips the Association sponsored. THS certainly benefited from these activities as it was here that Joy met many who would later become our speakers. For many years she was our Programme Secretary, not an easy job. She provided us with entertaining,



erudite and sometimes amusing lectures and had an extended file of people she could call on, so much so that the next year’s programme would be confirmed almost as soon as the old one finished.

When she decided that, finally, she wanted to give up, the Society made her an honorary member and very soon persuaded her to be our president, an

honour which she valued very highly. Even when she was in a care home her visitors told other residents of this!

Many of you will remember Joy through other organisations in the town. She was a founder member of Tonbridge U3A and until very recently was helping to organise its outings. She sang with Tonbridge Philharmonic Society and attended most meetings of the Tonbridge Music Club. In addition to her historical interests she loved Tonbridge and its people. Possibly, coming from a suburb of Birmingham, she liked the more intimate atmosphere of a smaller town and spent 63 years of her life here. The Society will remember her with gratitude.’



Children at play on the sportsground near the waterworks



Which boathouse was this?



A library or study, but where?

Acquisitions

We are most grateful to one of our members, Sally Morton, for a very generous donation made to the Society in memory of Joy Debney.

This has enabled us to purchase a substantial batch of historic photographs, many of them not seen before. They include the image on the front page showing visitors on the path that used to run from near the Big Bridge up to the Castle lawn, and the photo opposite showing children at play on the sportsground.

Most of the photos are unidentified so if anyone has any suggestions about the location of the boathouse, library(?) and windmill shown on these two pages, please let Pat Hopcroft know. (Contact details below)



Does anyone recognise this windmill?

Memories come flooding back?

September next year will be the 50th anniversary of the Great Flood of 1968, which propelled Tonbridge on to the front pages of the newspapers and led eventually to the construction of the flood barrier.

To mark the occasion we invite our readers to send in a brief reminiscence of the event, either as it affected you personally or which you have heard about from family or friends. Something quite short will suffice – say up to 200 words. Contributions will be placed permanently in the THS Archives, and may also appear (anonymously) on the Society's website next year.

So please think about it and send us something if you can. Photos of the flood are also most welcome.

Contact details: Please send your contributions by email to info@tonbridgehistory.org.uk, or bring them along to one of our meetings.



Here and there

Forthcoming History Courses

W.E.A. Courses in Tonbridge

Tuesday mornings at the Methodist Church, Higham Lane, Tonbridge TN10 4JG

More Historical Journeys through England (Tutor David Carder)
10 weeks from 26th September 2017, 10.15-12.15 £86

The Story of London from the Stuarts to Today (Tutor Ian Bevan)
5 weeks from 9th January 2018, 10.00-12.00 £43

Journey down the Thames (Tutor Hubert Pragnell)
5 weeks from 20th February 2018. £43.

Details from Susan Savva on 01732 358272 or email weatonbridgesecretary@gmail.com

Kent Adult Education Courses at the Adult Education Centre, Avebury Avenue

Four week Courses:

Bewitched – 17thC Witch Trials
4 weeks from 12th October 10.00-12.00

Unshackled – The Women’s Suffrage movement
4 weeks from 22nd February 2018 10.00-1.00

S.O.E. – Women Spies of WWII
4 weeks from 26th April 2018 10.00-12.00

One day Courses:

Christmas through the Ages.
2nd December 10.00-12.00

Story of the Bayeux Tapestry
17th March 2018 10.00-12.00

Three walking trails round Tonbridge are now available linking places of historical interest relevant to Tonbridge and its people in World War I. They have been developed by Pam Mills and Dave Swarbrick as part of a county-wide lottery-funded initiative. Free illustrated guide leaflets are available from the Library and Tourist Office, full of information, and worth reading even if you don't go on all the walks. The same information is also available online: go to <http://kentww1.com/100-miles/tonbridge-trail/> and click on the coloured pins on the map.