



***Railway Anniversary:*** 1<sup>st</sup> May this year marks the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of the direct line from London to Tonbridge via Orpington and Sevenoaks. Before then all trains ran via Redhill. The present station, shown here as it was in 1888, replaced an earlier wooden one on the far side of the road bridge. See page 6 for information about the new line.

# 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,

*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*)

*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).

## AGM

The Society's 2018 Annual General Meeting will take place on Thursday, 12<sup>th</sup> April at 7.30pm in the Riverside Room at the Angel Centre. Details are distributed with this *Newsletter*.

## From the Chairman

2018 should be a good year for those of us who like history since as well as the usual Heritage weekend in September there are two further historical weekends planned for Tonbridge – a Civil War weekend in May and a World War One weekend in August. Details are on pages 4 and 5.

At this time of year we usually appeal for people to come onto the committee but this year it is particularly urgent – I am due to stand down as Chairman at the AGM in April and Pat Mortlock, after 10 years hard work as treasurer, is also standing down. The committee will be down to only nine members so there is a great need for fresh people to join and help with the work of running your Society.

## Recent Meetings

At our **September** meeting Patsy Erskine-Hill looked at travellers to the Russian Tsars and what life was like at the court of the Tsars. She showed how Peter the Great was the first Tsar to open up Russia to influence and ideas from the West. A Scotsman, Patrick Gordon, even became Commander of the Russian army in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century and another Scot became an admiral in the Russian navy. This interest in the West was continued by Catherine the Great in the later 18<sup>th</sup> century. She used English garden designs in the grounds of the Catherine Palace and ordered an exclusive dinner service from the Wedgwood pottery. This 'Frog Service' consisted of 952 pieces of china and could serve 150 people!

In **October** Rod Shelton took us on a visit down the Darent valley with 13 villages and 3 market towns, picking out fascinating facts and events. In the Middle Ages Chipstead had the largest fish market in Kent and at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century three million pounds of tea were smuggled through Kent with a main route being the Darent valley. Percy Pilcher from Eynsford was an early pioneer of manned flight using gliders and was planning a powered flight but died in an air crash in 1899 before his plane could fly.

At our Two-session meeting in **November** Andrew Richardson gave two very interesting archaeology talks about discoveries at Dover and Folkestone. He first described finding a Bronze Age boat in 1992 in the centre of Dover during work for an underpass. The boat is 3,000 years old and probably the oldest seagoing boat found anywhere. Three quarters of the boat were recovered and it is now housed in a specially built gallery at Dover Museum. In his second talk he looked at discoveries on the East Cliff at Folkestone

where a Roman villa was first excavated in the 1920s and then again in the 1980s. Fresh excavations have been taking place since 2007 as the site is now slowly slipping into the sea. The remains of a late Iron Age Round House have been found as well as more evidence about the Roman villa.

In **December** Rebekah Higgitt from Kent University spoke about the 'quest for longitude'. Determining a ship's longitude at sea was a pressing problem for both the navy and international trade. So in 1714 the Government offered substantial rewards for finding a solution. Clockmakers, astronomers, seamen and others put forward ideas, both sensible and bizarre. Ultimately it was the fourth timekeeper from John Harrison – essentially a large precision watch – which did best, enabling mariners to carry Greenwich time with them on their journeys, which could be compared with the local time to calculate their longitude.

In **February** more than 100 members and guests braved wintry weather to hear Toby Butler's fascinating and well-illustrated talk about the Heritage of Hop Picking in West Kent. He explained how East Londoners provided one third of the labourers during the Hop Picking season (80,000 in 1900) and he showed pictures of the very basic conditions they lived in. He also showed two films looking at the work and life of hop pickers, both old and modern, and finished by talking about his ideas to keep alive the heritage of hop picking in the Tonbridge area.



**Saturday May 5th and Sunday May 6th 2018**

## **An English Civil War Re-enactment**

This event is being organised by the Tonbridge Town Team with the support of Tonbridge and Malling Council. It will involve the English Civil War Society who specialise in Civil War re-enactments using authentic weapons (cannon, muskets and pikes), costumes and other equipment.

The re-enactment will be 'loosely' based on actual events in Tonbridge in the summer of 1643. It will be centred on the castle but there will also be activities in other parts of the town.

The event is being billed as 'The Battle of Tonbridge' and is based on the events of July 1643 when Royalist 'rebels' gathered in Sevenoaks. Parliamentary troops under Colonel Richard Browne finally arrived in Sevenoaks but most of the Royalists had dispersed. Those who remained (500/600) were pushed

back to the outskirts of Tonbridge and there was a fight at Hilden Bridge on 24<sup>th</sup> July – described by Browne as 'a very hot fight' with some dead and 200 royalists taken prisoner.

During the two-day re-enactment Tonbridge Castle will be garrisoned 'in the name of King Charles'. Visitors will be able to meet the soldiers at the Campsite, watch displays by Musketeers, Pikemen, and the Cannon, and witness fierce battles as Parliamentary soldiers attempt to storm the castle on each day.

Tonbridge Town Team are encouraging local retailers, restaurants and cafés to participate in order to spread the event's impact throughout the town. They also want to encourage schools, clubs and other organisations to take part in the event both on the day itself and in the run-up to it.



**Saturday August 18th and Sunday August 19th 2018**

## **World War One Weekend**

This is one of a number of events currently being planned to remember the last year of the First World War. They are being organised by THS member Pam Mills, who also produced the First World War town trail.

The weekend will be centred on Tonbridge Castle and will feature a replica of the First World War tank presented to the town in 1919 and displayed outside the castle until the late 1930s – see photo below. There will also be World War I re-enactors, stalls, etc., and each day will finish with a communal sing-a-long. It is also hoped to run a special train with a decorated carriage containing re-enactors on the Medway valley line from Tonbridge to Strood and back. Full details for the weekend still have to be finalised.

Other events planned for the Spring and Summer are:

*Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> April*

Dinner dance at Hadlow Manor in aid of the Poppy Appeal, £25 per person.

*Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> April*

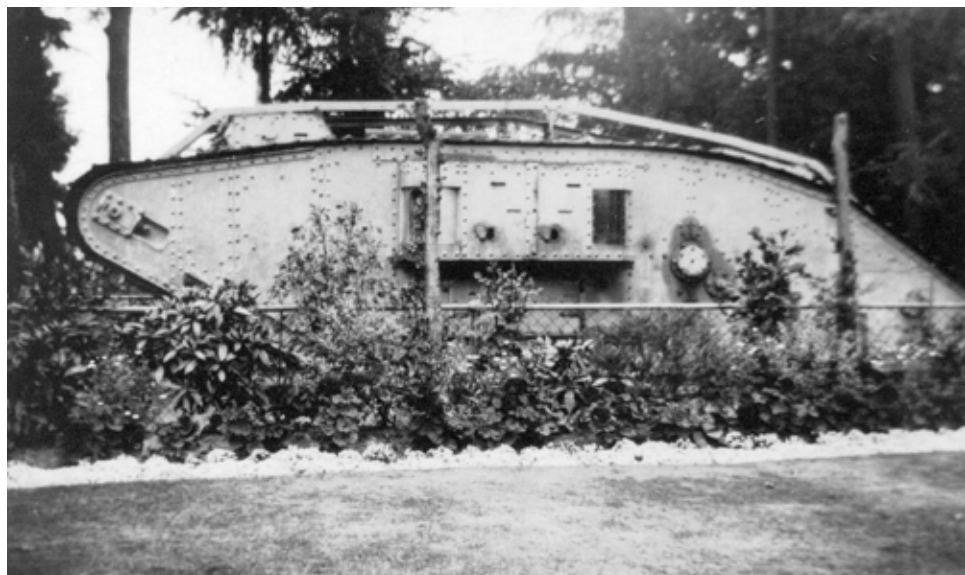
'The story behind the WW1 grave-stones'. This is a free event. Meet at the chapel in Tonbridge Cemetery, Shipbourne Road, at 2pm

*Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> July*

'Belgian refugees in Tonbridge' 7pm in Fuggles Bar, 165 Tonbridge High Street

Please contact Pam Mills for more information about all these events.

Events later in the year will focus on the centenary of the end of the war on 11<sup>th</sup> November 1918, and are being organised by Tonbridge Poppy Appeal. We expect to have details of these in our Autumn Newsletter.



**150 years ago**  
**Another railway anniversary**

**OPENING OF THE SOUTH EASTERN  
NEW LINE.**

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*The 'Daily News' of Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> May, 1868 reports the opening on the previous day of the new direct line from London to Tonbridge, replacing the original route via Redhill:*

“The new line, which is about 23½ miles in length, diminishes the distance between London and the principal termini of the South Eastern, and Paris of course, by about 13 miles ... There are seven stations nearly equidistant on the line, namely Chislehurst, Orpington, Chelsfield, Dunton Green, Riverhead, Sevenoaks, and Hildenborough or Watts Cross ... the scenery in the open and on the embankments is very fine, particularly in the neighbourhoods of Riverhead and Sevenoaks, where glimpses are obtained of Chevening-park, Earl Stanhope's seat.

There are as many as 83 bridges on the new line. It may be mentioned that the tunnels aggregate 7,500 yards in length, and that the embankments contain three million yards of earthwork and the cuttings three million yards of excavation. The embankment at Orpington is one of the longest and highest in existence, being above 80ft in height ... About 50 millions of bricks have been consumed in the works.

A new feature is introduced in the action of a bell in each station, which is connected with signal boxes on each side, up and down, and which gives notice when a train has been signalled out from a station on either hand.

Between the village of Chislehurst and Tonbridge ... lie the heaviest works on the new line – the heaviest in the height of the embankments, the length and depth of the cuttings, and the extent of the tunnelling, of any in the south of England, or probably, for a given length, in the United Kingdom...

Great difficulty was encountered in piercing the tunnels, particularly that at Sevenoaks, from the enormous quantity of water which burst in upon the navvies from the greensand overhead. After protracted and successful exertion the arches were cast, with seven rings of brick in some places, and in no place fewer than five. Sevenoaks is already furnished with water from this supply and it is intended to utilise the stream of excellent limpid water now running to waste at the rate of 1,000 gallons per minute, for the supply of Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells.

It may be expected that ... a large and profitable residential traffic will be created on the line ... The curves as well as the gradients are of the most favourable character, and both alike promise, with the other excellencies of the [rail]road, to add to the *éclat* already attaching to one of the most dashing railway runs in the world by “the express mail from London to Dover”.

*The opening had been delayed by problems with the embankments at Orpington and Hildenborough, and the estimated total cost was £627,000.*

## Midnight Burial

At midnight on 17<sup>th</sup> February 1632 a torchlight burial took place in Tonbridge Parish Church. According to a contemporary account, the corpse was brought 'in a chariot, covered with black velvet and attended on by eight coaches and a great troupe of horse'. The burial was that of Frances Walsingham, daughter of Queen Elizabeth's principal secretary and 'spymaster' Sir Francis Walsingham. Frances' third husband was Richard Burke, 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Clanricarde and Viscount Tunbridge, who built the mansion at Somerhill, and was laid to rest alongside his wife three years later.

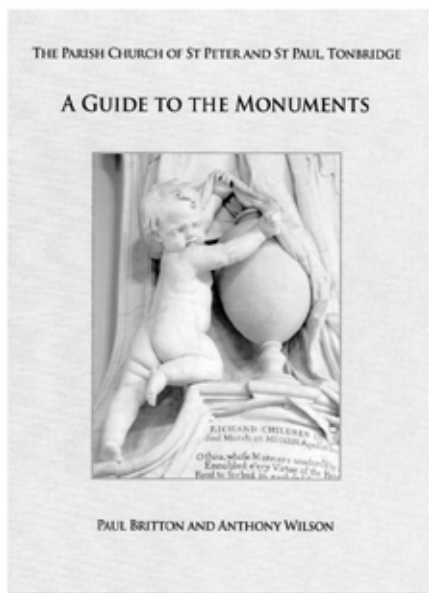
Unfortunately their burial-place is

now unknown, but many other graves and memorials survive in the church and have recently been professionally cleaned and repaired. Together they commemorate dozens of people important in Tonbridge town and parish between the early 17<sup>th</sup> century and the mid-20<sup>th</sup>. Members of well-known local families – Woodgates, Hookers, Childrens, Wellers, Austens – feature prominently.

The monuments tell us much about the town's history, but are also important artistically, several being by leading sculptors. Other town churches have similar collections, but Tonbridge's is particularly extensive.

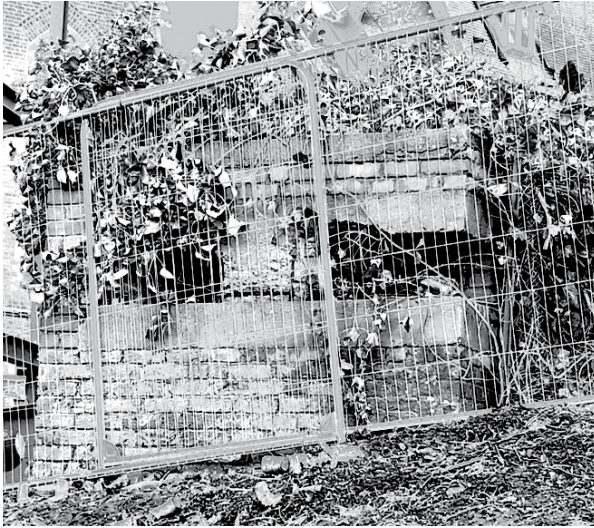


*Monument to Lady Philadelphia Lyttelton, a maid-of-honour to Catherine of Braganza, consort of Charles II. Philadelphia died in 1663, age 32, at Tunbridge Wells, of a 'burning fever' contracted while accompanying the Queen on a visit to the Spa.*



*Further information about the monuments and the people they commemorate can be found in a 36-page illustrated 'Guide to the Monuments' now available from the Parish Church, price £4. (Church open 10-12 Monday-Friday, 10-4 most Saturdays.)*

## Here and there

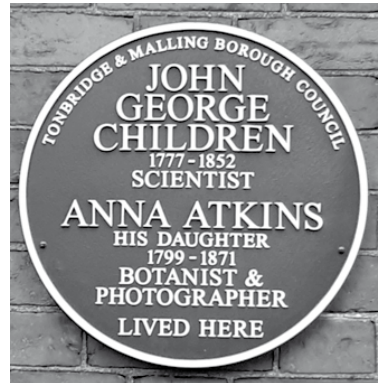


### Pillbox

Construction work at Tonbridge School means that a small WW2 pillbox on school property is now visible from London Road. It is on the west side of London Road, opposite Portman Park. With a partner box on the opposite side of London Road, now gone, it commanded the view down the High Street.

### Blue plaque

Recent additions to the town's blue plaques include this one on Ferox Hall in London Road. For information about the people commemorated go to [www.tonbridgehistory.org.uk](http://www.tonbridgehistory.org.uk) and click on 'People'.



### Hadlow Tower

Following the liquidation of the Trust which owned Hadlow Tower, the tower has now been sold into private hands. The Exhibition on the ground floor has

been dismantled, and it is not known if there will be any more occasions for public viewing. The tower is advertised as available to rent for Short Breaks.

