

# Autumn 2012



**Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society**

## ■ Local History Group

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### Visit to Battle Abbey

The Battle Abbey visit took place in perfect weather - a clear blue sky and 76-80 degrees F - and was enjoyed by all, despite problems with the A21. We owe a very special vote of thanks to Lionel Anderson for coordinating and administering the visit, which takes a great deal of time and a lot of attention to detail. **JC**



### Visit to Kent Archives

The new Kent History and Library Centre in Maidstone combines library, local history centre and archives. An organised tour of the facilities has been arranged for Thursday, October 4th. If you are interested, please contact John Cunningham on TW 534599.

### Remembrance

Two items of interest as we approach Remembrance Day:

- Ed Gilbert has been researching the names on the Tunbridge Wells War Memorial, and has identified the backgrounds for some 700 out of the total of 801. The details are on his web-site: [www.allabouttunbridgewells.com](http://www.allabouttunbridgewells.com).
- Richard Snow has produced a book on the ten local VC holders. It will be available from Waterstones, price £19.99. All profits will go to Help for Heroes.

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*Cover Picture: Garden Party, courtesy of David Bartholomew - [www.davidbartholomew.co.uk](http://www.davidbartholomew.co.uk)*



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# Personally Speaking

by Chris Jones

**The active life...** The Olympics seem to have come and gone with no reason for me to mention them in the Newsletter. But then I was never really taken with all that running about and throwing things. This pig on the other hand, seems to have just naturally sorted out the important things in life. It was at the Country Fair in Dunorlan.

And it provides a good excuse for me to talk about the 1830s, as pigs keep cropping up in the documents. They were mainly complaints of course - about neighbours' pig-sties. Dr Sopwith (he of the divorce case in our last issue) had the problem when he lived in Mount Pleasant



Terrace (where Hooper's is now), as did the owner of Poona Cottage, in Claremont Road. Anthony St John Baker, who lived in Mount Calverley Lodge, just to the right of the Royal Oak in Prospect Road, had stuff flowing into his garden from sties in Park St. But then he also had problems with new dung-pits on the corner of Calverley Park opposite; and the 'disgusting smell and vapour' from the Isard's tallow melting works in Windmill Fields. The police found that nobody had become sick as a result of the smell, or been forced to abandon their homes. Most people presumably got used to such things - there was a slaughter-house for example in Frog Lane. Of course it wasn't just animal waste. Collection and disposal of all "dirt, dust, ashes, rubbish, filth and soil", was the responsibility of the scavenger, appointed each year by the town commissioners (with no emptying of privies before midnight). Prospective scavengers submitted tenders indicating how much they were prepared to pay for the privilege. They also had to explain where they would store the collected material. Thomas Marchant in 1837 used Bath Farm, ie Happy Valley. He was replaced in 1840 by Henry Peerless who used Fellmongers Yard, later known as Madeira Park. That might be why your roses do so well.

**Old Newsletters...** We have been clearing out some of the Society archives and have uncovered a lot of old Newsletters, dating back to the 1970s. Perhaps it is presumptuous of me to think that you might want some, but if you do, then please just let me know. There is no charge, unless you want them posted.

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# From the Planning Scrutineers

by Alastair Tod



**Front Garden Parking** As urged by the Society, the Council has adopted a scheme requiring permission to convert a front garden. The present stage is experimental and applies in the St James/ Beulah Road area, building on a survey carried out by our members. We welcome this, which covers not just the use of gardens for parking but paving them over for any purpose, and the loss of front garden walls and hedges. We will urge extending this principle to other parts of the conservation area.

**Garage site, Upper Dunstan Road** This long narrow site holds disused former garages with very little room for alternative uses. We and nearby residents have objected in the past to over-intensive proposals, including one this spring for a five bedroom house and a two bedroom house in a boldly modern style. We were relieved when this scheme was withdrawn and a new proposal made for a five-bedroom house only, arranged so as to form two blocks linked by a single-storey section, more closely echoing the surroundings.

**Nursing Home, Warwick Park** The new owners of this home have applied to make internal changes and increase the number of bedrooms. This is strongly opposed by some neighbours, but we did not feel able to support all their objections, many of which relate to the management of the home. We were concerned about the increase in car-parking and objected on this ground. But the changes to the building would be barely visible and we could not see a planning reason for a wider objection to an established use. We were sorry not to be able to support the residents and suggested other ways of pursuing their concerns.

**Brewhouse Hotel** As members know, the Council refused consent for a major expansion of the hotel on the opposite side of Cumberland Walk and the owner appealed; the appeal has now been dismissed. The Society's objection was quoted in the appeal hearing and members of the Society gave evidence against the appeal. The Inspector criticised particularly the canopy over Cumberland Walk and the provision for refuse handling. We understand the applicant intends to try again.

**Trees, Calverley Road** The north side of Calverley Road between the Royal Oak and Carrs Corner consists of a fine stone wall (rather surprisingly not listed) topped with a continuous screen of trees. We were concerned by a recent application to fell the trees in a central fifty-yard section belonging to a Willicombe villa, as well as others on the site. *contd. on p.7*

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## Chairman's Letter

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Tunbridge Wells  
August 2012

*Welcome back from the summer recess.*

*I hope those of you who came to the Garden Party at Holden House enjoyed the evening. The photographs in this issue give a fine impression of the atmosphere of the event. Some 170 members and invited guests were able to visit the wonderful surroundings of the home and gardens of Alastair and Julie Levack. Our largest attendance ever! Alistair and Julie not only opened their home to us but kindly provided a jazz band and a magician which added to the enjoyment. While at times it looked as though the weather would spoil the event it turned out to be a fine sunny evening. I must thank all those Committee members and others who helped make the evening such a success. The only problem now is how to follow the occasion next year? Any ideas for a suitable venue would be gratefully accepted by the Committee.*

*The Garden Party is only one of our events for members. Our programme of talks is also well attended. For some talks this year we have had to make use of the balcony of the Council Chamber. Tunbridge Wells Borough Council is once again allowing your Society to use the Council Chamber for meetings in 2013 (except the February meeting when it is booked for a Council function and we will use Committee Rooms A and B). Roger Joye resigned from our Executive two years ago as he had moved to Goudhurst but still puts together our programme of talks for us for which we are very grateful. The talks for 2013 have already been booked and once again Roger has come up with a diverse range of topics that should appeal to our members. The full programme will be printed on your new membership card. They include: Charles Tattershall Dodd – Tunbridge Wells Victorian Artist; the Bewl Water Story; the Restoration of Hadlow Tower; and the Spitalfields Hospital Trust. The speakers include Dr Phillip Whitbourn, Ptolemy Dean and a senior member of TWBC. Such a good programme is a great reason to renew your membership and encourage your friends and neighbours to join.*

*Our Annual General Meeting is to be held in the Council Chamber on Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> November at 19:30 in the Council Chamber and I would encourage you to attend to show your support to the Executive Committee who have worked throughout the year on your behalf. In view of the increasing workload on civic amenity societies, which I mentioned in the previous newsletter, the Executive have been discussing how to reduce the work imposed on volunteers and the time required of them. We have now almost reached agreement on how the Society will be managed in the*

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*future and this will be explained at the AGM. Our plans involve fewer meetings for the majority of Executive Committee members but more involvement of ‘sub – groups’ to take responsibility for individual issues.*

*Those of you who attended the last AGM will have heard me introduce the concept of sub groups. After a slow start these are coming together, although I must say that the majority of the input is from Executive Committee members, with few individuals from the wider membership of the Society. Hopefully this will increase in the future.*

*Many of you will know that I was privileged to be invited to represent you on Bob Atwood’s Town Planning Advisory Panel. As an engineer and project manager involved in the construction industry for many years, I felt that I was well placed to add value to the discussions and the final report. It was pleasing that Philip Whitbourn’s undoubted knowledge, skills and experience were also drawn upon by the Panel.*

*Panel members have been asked not to comment publicly on the contents of the report for the present but I have written a brief article of the workings of the Panel for this issue of the newsletter which I hope you will find interesting. The report itself is currently available to download from the TWBC website and we are hoping that paper copies can be made available from the Tunbridge Wells Gateway in Grosvenor Road.*

*The future of the Panel, following the publication of its report, is still to be decided but I am hopeful that a representative from the Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society will continue to be one of its members.*

*I look forward to seeing you during our new membership year and particularly your support at the AGM in November.*

*John Forster*

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## **From the Planning Scrutineers** *Contd from page 5.*

Some of the trees are self-sown and others are in poor condition but we would regret the loss of the screen. We suggested permitting much of the felling, subject to strict conditions about replacement, and this is what the Council has decided.

**UPVC Windows, Mt Sion** We considered a case where timber windows in one of a terrace of identical houses had been replaced, without permission, with UPVC. Under the rules permission is needed in the conservation area unless the replacement ‘closely resembles’ the original. This is rarely the case with UPVC replacing timber, since its properties are so different; in this case the difference, from the original and the neighbouring properties, was unmistakable. Accordingly we objected to this retrospective application, which has now been withdrawn. **AT**

# Garden Party



Pictures courtesy of David Bartholomew, Charmian Clissold-Jones, Sue Daniels and Richard Still.



# The Tunbridge Wells Town Plan Advisory Panel

## John Forster explains the background to the recent report

When Bob Atwood was elected Leader of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council in 2011, he came to the post amid much confusion and distrust. There was controversy regarding the Regeneration Company and, in particular, the future of the Civic Centre. One of his first acts as leader was to 'push the pause button' on that particular scheme. We all waited to see what would happen next.

Bob's objective was to establish a vision of what residents and visitors wanted for the town, and to develop a long term strategy for achieving it. He realised that not everything could be undertaken in the short term, some things might take twenty years; but there should be a clear vision of what was desired and a strategy for making it happen. In times of austerity some plans that required substantial investment would be aspirational, but everything done in the short and medium term should be in line with, and not prejudice, the overall plan.

During 2012 Council officials are producing the next version of the Town Centre Area Action Plan (TCAAP). This document is due to be issued for public consultation during the autumn.

To assist officials in this work, Bob invited fourteen people who live or work in the town, with a diverse range of skills and interests, to produce an independent report which would hopefully assist officials in drafting the TCAAP. The report would have equal standing with individual responses during the public consultation, but might provide an initial

view of some of the points to be considered while drafting the plan.

The panel first met in November 2011 and has produced a report which was submitted to the Council in July 2012. A copy of the report (see opposite) can be downloaded from the Council's website.

As a starting point, panel members deliberated three questions:

- what makes Tunbridge Wells special and/or different?
- what are the essential characteristics that should be retained?
- what needs improvement?

These seemingly simple questions led to lengthy debates and it proved difficult to encapsulate the responses into concise simple sentences.

It became apparent that to produce a report with detailed recommendations in the time available, it would be necessary to divide the panel into subgroups each with a topic to consider. The topics were:

- Transport
- The public realm
- Employment and Retail
- Culture and Leisure
- Tourism
- Housing, and the natural and built environments

There were many other issues that could have been included but the time available, the size of the groups and the fact that many of the members were in full time employment meant that the panel had to focus on the key aspects.

A matrix was created to consider fourteen issues connected with each of

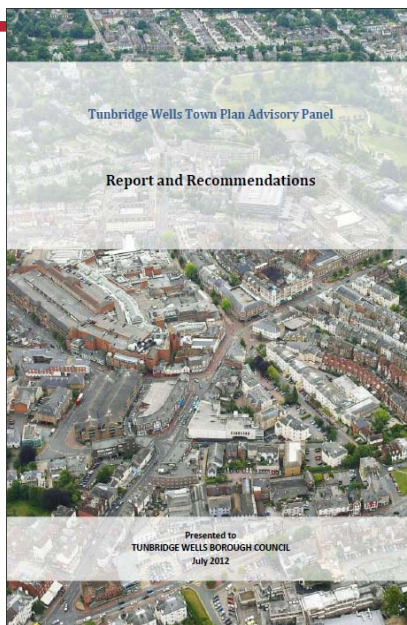
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the six topics, providing a total of 84 separate points for consideration. This matrix provided the structure for the final report and ensured a consistency of approach across the sub groups.

In May local elections took place. As a councillor, Bob Atwood could not take part in meetings during the period of pre-election ‘purdah’. James Partridge of Thompson, Snell and Passmore took the chair of the Panel and progress was maintained. Bob’s failure to be re-elected raised concerns about the future of the Panel. Fortunately the new Leader saw the value of the Panel and asked it to continue with its work and finish its report. He also asked Bob to re-join the panel as an independent member. The panel welcomed him back as their chairman.

The report is now available for all to read. It contains a disclaimer that the recommendations are not necessarily the views of all those on the panel nor of the bodies that they represent. I am sure that members of the RTWCS will disagree with some of the recommendations. They will have the chance to raise any concerns during the formal consultation process for the draft TCAAP later this year.

Some of the recommendations could be implemented in the short term with little cost while others will need more consideration, consultation and significant resources. The report does, however, provide TWBC with a view from a number of independent people of what they desire for it. It fulfils Bob Atwood’s initial intention of providing a basis for thought in drafting the Town



Centre Area Action Plan.

It is too early to gauge the Council’s reaction to the report or whether any of the recommendations will be included in the TCAAP – we wait to see.

As for the future of the panel there is a meeting scheduled for early September to discuss this. Having come together and formed what feels like a valuable body of informed opinion, the members would like to continue giving their time to add value to the Council’s thinking.

I do hope that you read the report and form your own opinion as to its value. The draft TCAAP will be published for consultation later this year and the report should provide you with food for thought when you read it. **JF**

The report can be downloaded from: [www2.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=4871](http://www2.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=4871). Alternatively go to [www2.tunbridgewells.gov.uk](http://www2.tunbridgewells.gov.uk), and search on ‘advisory’.



### June Bridgeman looks at life in Tunbridge Wells in 1873, and suggests that perhaps things were not quite as different as we might imagine

In October 1873 the new town cemetery at Frant Forest opened its gates to cater for rising demand as the town expanded. It was a year of weather extremes - the wettest winter recorded in England, then a boiling summer when “it seemed to be raining fire”. It also saw a world economic depression sparked off by dramatic bank failures after years of reckless lending. Britain went into a major trade slump. There was a halt in public works, a surge of bankruptcies, and escalating unemployment. But Tunbridge Wells was better placed than some to weather the storm. It now had a substantial and prosperous resident population, for whom the railways and the electric telegraph were transforming communications. Already, though, there were public complaints about dirty trains,

high fares and late running.

The average human life span was still under 50 years, mainly due to heavy mortality of young children. Diphtheria, measles, whooping cough and various forms of dysentery were their main killers. In 1873, 79 of the 225 burials in Woodbury Park cemetery were of children aged 10 years or younger. The proportion rose to 75% in January 1874.

But the rising middle classes were pressing for better sanitation, cleaner water and improved medical treatments. In 1874, Disraeli took over as prime minister and passed no fewer than 11 major pieces of social legislation over the next 2 years. Many of these directly affected the lives of Tunbridge Wells people, rich and poor alike. They set standards for, among other things, artisan dwellings, factory working hours, public health, unadulterated food and drugs, trade union protection, and the banning of sweeps’ climbing boys.

In 1870 an Elementary Education Act had provided for all children to attend school between the ages of 5 and 12. Local ratepayers could petition the Board of Education to set up grant-aided Board schools if there were not enough places in church and



The Pantiles, 1870. Note the spiked railings in the bottom right. There had been complaints about urchins washing their boots in the chalybeate spring.

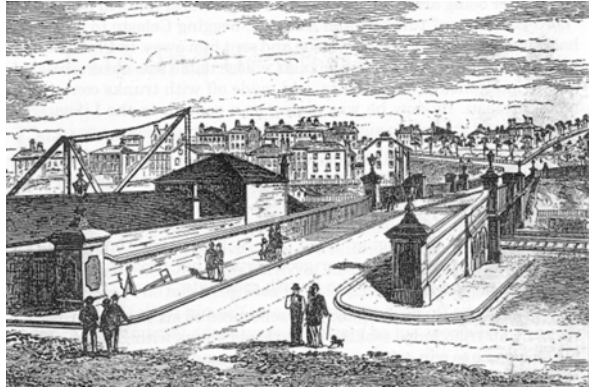
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Grosvenor Bridge. Designed by William Brentnall, opened in the 1880s. Brought together two parts of the town.

private schools - shades of Free Schools. Attendance of all children up to the age of 10 was made compulsory only in 1880. Then, as now, there were hot debates about sectarian versus board schools, the educational standards to be met, fears by church schools that they would lose their grants to board schools and concerns about where the costs should fall. In Tunbridge Wells, the well-established church schools, supported by voluntary contributions, continued to dominate the educational scene

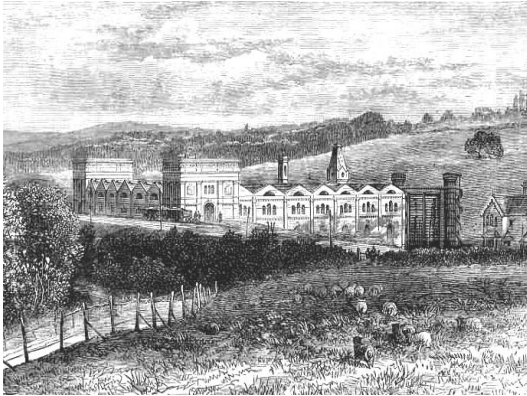
All this kept the Town Commissioners very busy developing local rules and standards. To provide a fitting setting for their labours, they decided to refurbish the municipal buildings with a new Council chamber in their premises in Calverley Road. The architect was the town civil engineer and surveyor William Brentnall who during his 24 years in office transformed - and not before time - the town's sewerage system and water supplies to a "vast and comprehensive system brought to perfection at enormous cost". He also designed the first Grosvenor Bridge over the railway, to enable local citizens to move more freely between neighbourhoods. No doubt all these public works, as today, caused protracted local traffic problems.

One of his early tasks was to lay out



the new burial ground at Frant Forest as what was described as one of the most beautiful cemeteries in England. When he was buried there in 1894 his epitaph, like Christopher Wren's, might well have read "reader if you would see his monument look around you". The 1873 consecration was by the Bishop of Chichester, "a dear kind very episcopal old man". Among the dignitaries present was William Willicombe, builder in chief to many of those present. Indisposition kept him in his private carriage throughout the ceremony but he was able to attend the "capital cold collation" at the recently opened Great Hall and to reply with "a most appropriate speech" to the toast "The town and trade of Tunbridge Wells".

Meanwhile, the young Sir David Lionel Salomons was embarking on a series of popular scientific lectures for the edification of Tunbridge Wells citizens. For technology was proceeding apace. More and more dwellings were being connected to the Tunbridge Wells Gas Company, whose last gas holders



New Gas Works at High Brooms, 1880. Earlier proposals to site them at High Rocks were abandoned after lobbying by residents of Hungershall and Nevill Parks.

dominating the High Brooms skyline for 130 years are only now about to be demolished. A hot water geyser in the home transformed the business of washing. This was the year of the first typewriter and the first electric cooking appliance, while the telephone and gramophone were just over the horizon. Foreshadowing today's business practices, the first conference call was made, between employees of the Atlantic and Pacific Telegraph Company in a string of cities. "Each person remained in his office and telegraphed his remarks or motions to the others. The meeting was entirely harmonious throughout and the state of the weather and condition of the wires peculiarly favourable to its success."

New technology was also tackling crime. 43,634 photographs were taken of convicted criminals in 115 county and borough prisons, leading to arrest, on later re-offending, of 156. A Parliamentary Committee praised the strategy of targeting the smaller number in the Habitual Criminals Dossier to produce a

higher hit rate of 373 captures.

As for lesser misdemeanours, the paparazzi were already a problem. Queen Victoria recorded in her diary in September 1873 that while sketching at a remote spot near Ballachulish "here in this complete

solitude we were spied upon by impudently inquisitive reporters who followed us everywhere; but one in particular ....lay down and watched with a telescope.." By way of cheering up the economic gloom, a Royal Wedding was booked for early 1874 - Queen Victoria's second son Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh was marrying Grand Duchess Maria, daughter of the Russian Tsar in St Petersburg amid "unusual magnificence" and "gorgeous festivities". Three years later came the razzmatazz as the Queen was declared Empress of India - some said the tipping point for her was when the new Duchess insisted on being addressed as Her Imperial Highness and thus took precedence over the Princess of Wales. Popular magazines in the late Victorian years show the public as avid then as today for stories about the Royals.

Clothes and fashion were going through another sea change with bustles and swathes of ruffles replacing the crinoline and some fashionistas indulging in the Dolly Varden style lampooned in a music hall song in words that might come

from an exasperated parent today:

*Have you seen my little girl? She doesn't wear a bonnet.*

*She's got a monstrous flip-flop hat with cherry ribbons on it.*

*She dresses in bed furniture just like a flower garden*

*A blowin' and a growin' and they call it Dolly Varden"*

On the security front, Irish problems were as ever simmering away with demands for Home Rule and fears of Fenian terrorists. Meanwhile in Parliament, Vernon Harcourt had produced a paper on the excessive size of the peacetime military establishment in relation to the "unmistakable shape" of needs in the field, which required larger and more complete preparations than in former days" Throughout Victoria's reign not a single year passed without Britain being involved in a war, large or small, in some foreign field.

In Tunbridge Wells, battles were being fought on a different field. Sport was a local enthusiasm whetted by rivalry with Tonbridge. Athletics and football were both popular. The previous winter, Wanderers - a team mainly of former public schoolboys - had beaten the Royal Engineers 1-0 to win the first Football Cup Final. But Tunbridge Wells' special passion was cricket. "If you are not a cricketer here you are nothing" opined one local guide book. This was the era when WG Grace, as the leading English batsman, was "a hero among men and in the eyes of schoolboys a sort of divinity".



THE DOLLY VARDEN FAREWELL KISS

New types of games were also becoming popular. Croquet had recently been officially recognised and now tennis was following suit. Major Wingfield devised a form that he called Sphairistika, taking the name from the Greek word 'sphairos' meaning ball. This scarcely rolled off the tongue and happily Arthur Balfour - later to become prime minister- suggested "lawn tennis" instead.

All in all it seems that the interests and concerns of Tunbridge Wells citizens in 1873 were not all that different from today. If you would like to join our Hawkenbury Memorial Inscriptions group to delve into local Victorian lives and times, or to bring along your clipboard and biro to record some inscriptions on the gravestones, we should be delighted to hear from you. Just contact me on [jbman@btinternet.com](mailto:jbman@btinternet.com) or TW 525578. **JB**

## - Tunbridge Wells - no backwater

### Alastair Tod discovers some personalities who brought key events from the wider world into the town

Although a genteel resort, Tunbridge Wells has always reflected the strong currents, social, cultural and literary of the wider world. At the March meeting we heard about Rachel Beer, who edited the *Observer* and the *Sunday Times* in the eighteen-nineties, and spent her last twenty-five years in (the former) Chancellor House. After the death of her husband and a breakdown, her family had her declared insane and incapable of managing her considerable fortune.

Rachel was born Sassoon, of a Jewish family which originated in Baghdad, prospered in British India, and became prominent in London's Victorian high society. Rachel consciously and openly straddled two cultures, oriental exotic and liberal intellectual. As editor she promoted the arts, the welfare of the poor

and the rights of women, until tragically, with the medical and social attitudes of the time, she was herself pronounced incapable and confined.

Rachel's husband was Frederick Beer, English-born of a family which arrived from Frankfurt in the mid-nineteenth century at a London which was a magnet for Germans with professional and commercial backgrounds, and those escaping the restrictions on Jews. Frederick's father never renounced Judaism but his son was baptised. The Beers prospered as bankers and financiers of railways in Britain and abroad, and in time acquired the two leading Sunday newspapers.

Rachel's brother, Alfred Sassoon, similarly straddled cultures: he married Theresa Thornycroft, a high church Anglican and an artist herself from a prominent artistic family. Unlike Frederick Beer, Alfred was disinherited for marrying outside the faith. The marriage produced three children but was not otherwise a success, and the couple separated. Theresa Sassoon and her children lived at Weirleigh, a gaunt house outside Matfield; when Alfred visited, Theresa was said to shut herself in a cupboard but she remained close to her sister-in-law Rachel. Theresa named the future poet Siegfried for her love of Wagner.

In spite of the disinheritance there was enough money for Siegfried, on leaving Cambridge, to spend his time hunting and



"Rachel played up her exotic features by dressing as an oriental lady" from 'First Lady of Fleet Street' by Eilat Negev & Yehuda Koren



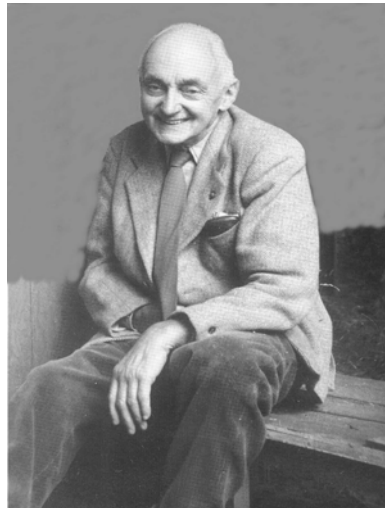
Siegfried Sassoon  
- WWI hero and  
war poet.

playing village cricket, the years he recorded in 'Memoirs of a Foxhunting Man'. He was one of the generation who went gladly to war in 1914; in this earlier spirit he wrote of 'the happy legion'. Siegfried went on to be wounded, be decorated for bravery, and then rebel publicly against the conduct of the war, if not the war itself, and be saved from court-martial by being classed as suffering from shell-shock – a sequence recorded in the Regeneration trilogy by Pat Barker. It is his later graphic denunciations of the slaughter in the trenches which earn him a place among the war poets.

Neighbours of the Sassoons in Matfield, who became great friends of Siegfried's brother Michael and his wife, were the Willetts. Wilfred Willett, just qualified as a doctor, also joined up in 1914 and was severely wounded. Wilfred only survived because of the determination of his wife in getting him back to hospital in England, and his ability to diagnose his own head injury. Their story forms the basis of the book 'Wilfred and Eileen' by Jonathan Smith, which was made into a TV series in the 1980s. He was severely handicapped for

the rest of his life; an earnest Christian he set out on a road which led from radical politics and trade unionism, organising the agricultural workers and servants of Tunbridge Wells and wrangling with the vicar, to preaching the gospel of Lenin. In time, his long-suffering wife drove him into Tunbridge Wells to sell the *Daily Worker* in Camden Road. The historian Richard Cobb was something of a disciple. He said that "Wilfred radiated goodness, confidence and simple joy".

Wilfred came to Matfield as a damaged war-hero because his parents Thomas and Susie Willett were living at The Homestead in Upper Cumberland Walk, a country cottage being more suitable for him than the excitements of the town. The Willetts were builder-developers, responsible for high-class areas of Brighton and the Cadogan Square area of London. By Edwardian times the firm,



Wilfred Willett. It was said that "he tried to live out the Sermon on the Mount"

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later to become Bovis, was run by Wilfred's uncle William, an able and energetic manager, who, however, devoted much of his life to promoting daylight saving, not just for business efficiency but as a humanitarian cause. Daylight saving was finally adopted in 1916 to promote war-production.

The life of Thomas and Susie Willett provides a vision of Tunbridge Wells between the wars rather different from the lonely state of Rachel Beer, and indeed their son Wilfred. Thomas, although qualified in the law, lived in some style as a gentleman of leisure. Susie Willett, herself the daughter of a Brighton shopkeeper, was a social queen with a strong sense of her position; her day consisted of being driven to buy clothes, meet her elegant friends and play bridge. She ignored the political activity of her son, telling herself none of her friends would be seen in Camden Road.

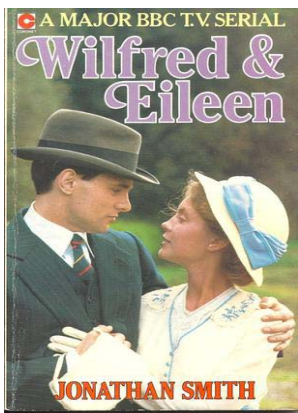
Wilfred's daughter Marjorie attended the High School in Camden Hill, until Susie heard that another pupil was the daughter of a chauffeur, at which point



The Homestead. Upper Cumberland Walk she paid for Marjorie to attend a private school in Frant Road. When Thomas died and Susie's resources were much reduced, she was obliged to move to Lansdowne Road, a sharp demotion according to her acute sense of social geography.

Marjorie's own career reflected the complex cultural and political links of the town. After her first husband was killed in the Second World War she married again, to Arthur Seldon, brought up as an orphan in the East End after his Russian Jewish parents died in the Spanish flu epidemic. A distinguished economist, Arthur belonged to the strand of liberalism which deeply mistrusted the state, was an associate of Sir Keith Joseph and helped to inspire Margaret Thatcher. Arthur and Marjorie's son Anthony Seldon is an educational authority and progressive head-master of Wellington College.

The present owner of the Homestead received a visit from Marjorie Seldon, who explained it was her grandparents' house which she used to visit as a child. 'I know who you are', he said. **AT**



## — Putting Faces to Names: David Wright —

I joined the Civic Society shortly after we received a Conservation Award in 2010. Prior to that, I had always imagined it as one which objected to planning applications, had regular public meetings, and owned the animal pound on Grove Hill Road!

So here it was, a Society encouraging the best in conservation in Tunbridge Wells. Anything positive like that appeals to me, so I agreed to join the committee. In the Spring issue, Peter Clymer reported that he had been co-opted onto the committee by an un-named member. Well, the same thing happened to me, so this mystery person is gaining a bit of a reputation!

What has surprised me is the scope and aims of the Society and, yes, it still has a lot to say about planning applications, some of which pay no heed to heritage and the visual environment. I worked in Maidstone for many years and it is plain to see what can go wrong when the council lets planning applications through without proper consideration. I think I am correct in saying that hardly a single bomb fell on Maidstone during the war – all the damage has been done or allowed to be done by people who should have known better.

People respond to their environment, and what a unique environment we have here in Tunbridge Wells! It could, however, be vastly improved. The Cinema site has been a persistent eyesore



for as long as some residents can remember. It is a monument to civic complacency.

The Commons used to be heathland, but there are now so many trees that vital vistas have been lost. A glance at old postcards reveals some great views which could be regained.

I have lived in Tunbridge Wells for 27 years and the town has so much going for it. Where else can you be within 50 minutes of the capital yet get to the seaside or even France in not much time at all? We also have stunning countryside right on our doorstep.

For me however, the big question for the future is “what draws people to visit Tunbridge Wells?” We don’t have a major art gallery, national class museum or a stunning theatre. There needs to be a lot more imagination deployed to increase the draw of the town and make it a place where people want to come. This could have a knock-on effect on the retail and restaurant trade. The number of empty shops is still continuing to rise.

My other big interest is conservation. Living in an old house has taught me just how important it is to use traditional materials and techniques. It is a joy to see old buildings repaired or restored using lead, lime mortar and fine joinery. Some of these crafts are fast disappearing and the Society is right to encourage the best.

That brings me back to where I started.

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## The Wells by Patrick Gooch

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**The Society is always interested in new books about Tunbridge Wells, be they factual accounts or fiction. A new novel, *The Wells*, combines elements of both. Its author, Patrick Gooch (left), gives us a brief glimpse of what to expect.**

The subject of my new book will be familiar to members of the Civic Society. It is set during the early years of the eighteenth century, at a time when the lease had expired on the buildings in the Pantiles, and Richard “Beau” Nash first makes his entrance as Master of Ceremonies.

This was an intriguing phase in the town’s history; and though a work of fiction, the book draws upon many of the characters and events that took place in the 1730s. Moreover, many of the personalities of the period make telling appearances.

In many ways this is a departure from the format I normally favour. While my previous books have woven stories around actual events, this is the first time I have embarked upon a novel set in the past.

People have asked me, why write about Tunbridge Wells? That was an easy question to answer. I live in Crowborough, and my wife and I are frequent visitors to the town. It was by chance I came across a reference to *The Rusthall Manor Act of 1739*. An interesting piece of legislation. It caught my imagination, and the theme for the book developed from there.

Members will recall that the Act resolved a quarrelsome period between the Lord of the Manor of Rusthall, Maurice Conyers, and the freeholders, over ownership of the Pantiles. In 1682 the then Lord, Thomas Neale, and the freeholders had embarked upon a joint agreement to lease the area around the well to a London company, and to allow buildings to be erected. When the lease expired fifty years later, despite much discussion, fierce argument and frequent ill-temper, no accommodation could be reached between the two parties over precisely who owned what.

After seven years of bitter wrangling, Parliament stepped in and created the Rusthall Act. The heart of this quaint piece of legislation was a lottery to determine who would own various sections of the Pantiles.

In many respects the Act was unique. I waded through a number of archives, and the only comparable edict I could find was a side event to the Finnmark Act made law in 2005. Finnmark is a remote territory in Norway, located above the Arctic Circle. The authorities were apportioning fifty thousand square kilometres among the *bona fide* residents, and in some instances they resorted to

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drawing lots.

In the 1739 Act, the lots were divided two to one in favour of the Lord of the Manor. When the lottery took place, the freeholders drew the middle section of the Upper Walk, which comprises numbers 18 – 44 in the present-day Pantiles.

The lead figure in the book is a young doctor called Marius Hope. Troubled by many of the practices at St Bartholomew's Hospital in London, in the Summer of 1736 he journeys to The Wells to contemplate his future. Unwittingly, he is caught up in a series of tragic events: two fatal fires and a death on the town racecourse. Much is made of his medical background in helping to reveal the extent of a conspiracy festering beneath the façade of this genteel Georgian township.

What the good doctor does not appreciate is that the incidents are linked

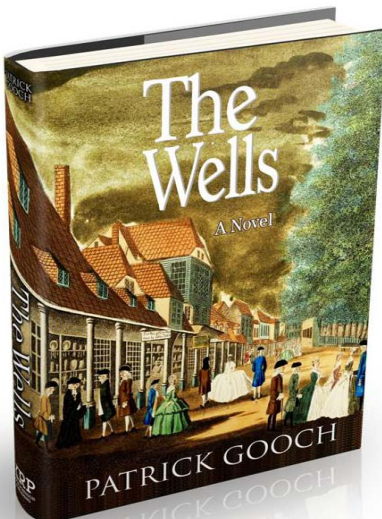
to a calculated manoeuvre to wrest ownership of the Walks, which we now know as the Pantiles, from The Lord of the Manor and the freeholders. Dissension over the ownership question is already running high, and this is further aggravated when many of the freeholders are pressurised into selling their title rights.

In the book the notable individuals of the period are portrayed in a manner that gives them an extra dimension: displaying both their virtues and vices. Some even make energetic contributions to the drama as it unfolds.

Although the pace and happenings in the novel demand much of the doctor's attentions, there is a love element in the tale - and even in those times romance never followed a straight path.

Marius Hope is much taken by a young lady. The complication is, she is the niece of Maurice Conyers, the Lord of the Manor, whom our hero suspects is the mastermind behind all the chicanery. I will not say more, other than to declare that, as you might expect, it all ends exceedingly well for everyone. . . except, of course, for the conspirators.

The publisher, Knox Robinson, has already commissioned another two books featuring Marius Hope, to complete the trilogy. *The Wells* will be in bookshops in September, in hardback and ebook format. The paperback edition will be available in March next year. **PG**



## - A Wealden Rap

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**In the last issue I mentioned a Civic Voice survey asking how proud we were of our communities. I suggested that Brian Lippard's article might have been an example of local pride. I received another contribution earlier in the year. When I first read Edward Tirbutt's poem (extract below) I thought it was traditional verse, but a re-reading suggests that it is actually a rap.**

When in conversation I first heard mention of the Weald,  
My ignorance imagined it to be some form of Polo field.  
But at that time my naivety of the world was such  
That I was clearly and irrevocably so out of touch,  
That I confused a young friend's partner on introduction  
By enquiring whether their joint venture was in full production !  
But to revert to the Weald, I have come to understand  
And love the history and significance of this land.  
First named the Wild, a mighty forest impenetrable to all  
Save mighty Caesar and his legions, as they poured in from Gaul.  
In Cantium brave Kentish men fought well, but lost the day.  
Prima Britannia was occupied. Roman law held sway.  
Later Danish hordes laid waste the countryside,  
Until Alfred and Andreasweald restored the Kentish pride  
And the Weald enjoyed unbroken peace 'til came the day  
The usurping Norman conqueror made his victorious way  
From Dover on to London, but was forced to pause,  
For advancing trees bore down upon him. He sought out the cause -  
A fast moving band of Kentish men, each carrying a bough,  
Which so amazed the Conqueror that he made a solemn vow  
To return their ancient customs of free tenure of the land.  
Rumour has it that this trick was later used by the Bard's prolific hand  
When describing the moving wood from Birnam to Dunsinane,  
A phenomenon which you may recall caused Macbeth no little pain.  
*... the poem continues with a description of the Wealden iron industry and ends ...*  
Hops may be partly history, but old oast houses tell the tale  
That the magic of the Weald still grips us, and will never fail  
To hold our interest. This land is alive with mystery.  
Terrible Down, and Slaughter Common surely must have a history?  
Search and you will be rewarded most certinally by the Weald,  
As its fascinating history will slowly be revealed.

# BE INSPIRED AND CHALLENGED / SHORT COURSES PROGRAMME

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## Short courses

### Historic buildings along the River Thames from its source to Teddington

10 weeks from 25 September  
Tuesdays, 10.30am - 12.30pm  
Course fee: £100

### A Mirror to Nature: Dutch Painting in the 17th Century

6 weeks from 26 September  
Wednesdays, 10.30am - 12.30pm  
Course fee: £60

### The Geology of South East England

10 weeks from 27 September  
Thursdays, 2 - 4pm  
Course fee: £100

10 weeks from 27 September  
Thursdays, 7 - 9pm  
Course fee: £100

### The Beautiful and the Damned: a study of 8 American writers

8 weeks from 27 September  
Thursdays, 10.30am - 12.30pm  
Course fee: £80

### Latin for Local Historians

4 weeks from 28 September  
Fridays, 10.30am - 12.30pm  
Course fee: £40

### Changes in English Fiction in the early 20th Century

4 weeks from 20 October  
Saturdays, 10am - 12 noon  
Course fee: £40

## Study days

### Picasso

Study day: Saturday 27 October  
10am - 4pm Course fee: £25

### Madness and Medicine 2: Trauma Fictions

Study day: Friday 2 November  
10am - 4pm Course fee: £25

### Mignons and Murder at the French Court

Study day: Saturday 24 November  
10am - 4 pm Course fee: £25

### Starting to Write Poetry

Study days: Saturdays 10, 17 November  
10am - 2.30pm Course fee: £40

### Introduction to Social and Environmental Psychology

Study day: Monday 12 November  
10am - 4pm Course fee: £25

University Centre Tonbridge, Avebury Avenue, TN9 1TG

Just a few minutes walk from the railway station and close to the High Street



# CIVIC SOCIETY

## Forthcoming Events

Meetings start at 7.30pm on the second Thursday in the month (unless otherwise stated) in the Town Hall. Remember to bring your membership card.  
Suggested £2 donation from non-members.

Entrance to the Town Hall is via the main door. If you are late and find that it is locked, please ring the bell and wait to be admitted.

<b>Oct 4th</b>	<b>Visit to Kent History and Library Centre, Maidstone</b> Afternoon visit, by the Local History Group, but open to all. Please see page 2.
<b>Oct 11th</b>	<b>Put Water Back in the Wells !</b> <b>John Cunningham</b> explains a long-term campaign by the Town Forum and others to put water back in 'The Wells', so that our spa town image is not lost for ever.
<b>Nov 8th</b>	<b>Annual General Meeting</b> (see agenda below) Followed by an open forum for members.
<b>Dec 13th</b>	<b>Smuggling: the Pantiles 'alter ego'.</b> <b>Grahame Bell</b> tells how, while the gentry promenaded, illicit business was being carried on in the shadows.

### Agenda of the Annual General Meeting

1. Apologies for absence
2. Minutes of the previous AGM held on 10th Nov 2011
3. Matters arising from the minutes, not covered elsewhere on the agenda
4. Chairman's report and address
5. Elections - Vice-Presidents, Committee members\*, Officers\*
6. Annual accounts and report - Nigel Price, Treasurer
7. Report on the Local History Group - John Cunningham, LHG Chairman
8. Date of next Annual General Meeting

\*Nominations, signed and seconded, must be received by the Secretary (address on page 3) by Thursday 25th October.

The views expressed in this Newsletter are those of the named author or of the editor and do not necessarily reflect the official views of the Society.

Published by the Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society. Registered Charity No. 276545

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