Alfred Tennyson in Grove Hill Gardens

As Alastair Tod reports on page 5, we have been awarded a Heritage Grant by the Council to erect more plaques commemorating notable residents. So we are working through lists of possible candidates trying to agree appropriate criteria for selection. I hadn’t previously realised that Alfred Tennyson lived in Grove Hill Gardens. He is in the 1841 census there, with his mother and sisters. However, he is said not to have liked the town: “my abomination” is how he described it in a letter of 1840. That probably rules him out for a plaque.

Tunbridge Wells Doctor at Arnhem

2014 is the 70th anniversary of the Battle of Arnhem, when the Allies sought to capture strategic bridges ahead of a general push into Germany. Philip Reindeers is hoping to publish a booklet about it in the Netherlands in September. He has asked for help in identifying a Dr Victor David Randall Martin who lived in Tunbridge Wells. Dr Martin was a Captain with the 1st Airlanding Light Regiment Royal Artillery, and died in 2001. If anyone knows anything of him, please contact me (Chris Jones) and I will pass on the information.

Welcome

A warm welcome to the following new corporate members:

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An awful responsibility postponed ... In the last Newsletter we reported that after fifty years of service Gill Twells was withdrawing from direct involvement in the Committee. In that time she has contributed an amazing amount to the work of the Society. It was only afterwards that something awful occurred to me. With Gill gone, I would be the longest-serving member of the Committee. An uncomfortable feeling indeed - despite the lack of hair and the grey beard, I don’t feel old enough or grown-up enough to handle such a responsibility. Fortunately Gill remains a Vice-President, and, as we hold Committee meetings in her sitting room anyway, she continues to attend.

Back in 1964 when Gill joined the Society, and I was just out of short trousers, the Society was pondering the impact on the town of the Beeching Report. There were proposals to develop the land between Mt Pleasant and London Rd, and to further the town’s function as an important shopping centre.

One might think that few things change, but that year there was a reduction in annual subscriptions - from 10/6 to 10/- - “to ease our Treasurer’s task”. Younger members will need to convert 10/6 to 52.5 p. Older members might remember it as a half-guinea. To trigger your memories of the period, I thought you might like to see this picture of Five Ways in 1971. That’s a Green Line coach version of a Routemaster double-decker, with an enclosed platform at the back. The 704 ran up through Sevenoaks and Bromley to Victoria, and then via Slough to Windsor.
From the Planning Scrutineers

by Alastair Tod

Following concerns about the appearance of McColls (recently Martin’s) at the corner of Chapel Place, we approached the owners who were in fact planning a renovation. Their proposal involved blanking out three windows with colourful over-size graphics, as well as smaller graphic panels elsewhere, and an illuminated fascia. This seemed to us inappropriate, and we suggested, if blanking out the windows was necessary, dividing the display into sections with smaller images.

This was apparently accepted, but when a planning application appeared it featured a mock-up showing the large graphics (in effect advertising displays) on three windows, and we made an objection. McColls then withdrew the mock-up, and were persuaded by the conservation officer to drop the fascia lighting. However the consent now given does appear to include large-scale graphics on two windows. A disappointing result, but we will see what actually happens.

In a previous report we noted the change in planning law which permits offices to be converted to housing without planning permission. Two such cases in Calverley Road caused ripples last year in connection with the need for parking. Now the tide has reached Wellington Gate in Church Road, the oversize sixties block formerly Europa House. It has been determined that this too does not need planning permission to become flats.

We were pleased to see the application by the Belvedere Estate to refurbish the lamp columns at the entrance to Lonsdale Gardens. These are in rusticated limestone said to be from the 1740s, and have suffered from erosion and traffic impacts and have lost their lanterns. Clues to the latter survive in substantial iron collars. The Estate proposes to move the columns a few metres into Lonsdale Gardens and reinstate the lanterns. We regret the move, which will make the columns less visible from Mt Pleasant, but can see the necessity. But we have objected to the proposed lanterns which seem to us too small and not, as they should be, mounted on the surviving collars. The application is pending.

Finally, we are pleased to have been awarded a Heritage Grant by the Council to revive the programme of commemorative plaques to people of note, on buildings with which they were associated. The aim is to erect twenty plaques this year, the first being to William Vidler, a marine who was one of the first to be killed in the First World War, and who lived in Nelson Road, Hawkenbury.
Chairman’s Letter

Tunbridge Wells
March 2014

Since I last wrote we have welcomed the Council’s ‘Vision’ for the next five years - although we queried whether looking five years ahead could be called a vision. We also wondered whether the ideas for the next five years really fed into what might happen after that.

Even in the present stringency we can shape the future and we applaud the Council’s determination to do so, especially in the town centre which has suffered such a long period of stagnation. A cornerstone is the proposal for a cultural hub comprising the Library, Museum, Art Gallery and Adult Education Centre. All of these at present are seriously short of space and modern facilities, while the site has scope for expansion. Maidstone, Canterbury and Eastbourne show what can be done by developing these.

We offered support for the hub proposals we have seen, and asked to be involved in their development. The feasibility study published in the autumn and the Council Leader’s remarks to members in February left some intriguing loose ends. Philip Whitbourn’s ideas on behalf of the Society for the whole civic complex were circulated last year, and, we understand, well received, but it is still unclear how far they have been taken on board.

When the Vision appeared in the press, doubts were raised particularly over drawings showing the war memorial moved and a major extension on the front of the Library. We understand this is not the Council’s intention and their appearance in this way caused embarrassment to the architect responsible. It seems the Council intends to respect the obligations imposed by the listing of the war memorial and parts of the buildings, and we rely on this.

A problem is that the Vision proposals do not embrace the civic complex as a whole. Members will remember our idea of a glazed atrium entrance between the Library and the Town Hall, a welcoming modern entrance to both; this did not appear in the Vision. The welcome plans to improve the Assembly Hall are not related to the adjacent hub, and the future of the Town Hall is once more unclear, with enigmatic references to new offices on Council-owned land in Mt Pleasant Avenue.

We felt the published ideas for the hub were some way short of showing how it would work, and it seems that, as defined, it would need a continuing subsidy. The
The idea is to support it by offering space within, on commercial terms to cultural and related start-ups. The principle is welcome but we wonder how much space there will be for this, or how many cultural start-ups could afford commercial rents. This would be easier if more space was found by linking to the Town Hall.

Another loose end concerns the Gateway. In its present form this is threatened with the withdrawal of KCC support, and has been shown to be expensive in staffing. The Council is accelerating the adoption of on-line services and reducing face-to-face transactions. The feasibility study mentions a much reduced Gateway being housed in the cultural hub, a slightly odd combination, but we have not heard a specific proposal.

This is the basis for linking the civic complex physically with a single public entrance and reception. Clearly we are awaiting a decision on the future of the Town Hall, and the other elements of the Vision can hardly be progressed without this. To comply with standards which become mandatory in 2019 the building needs modernising at a cost estimated at £5 million. It seems the alternative would be new offices for say 250 staff (with or without the space required for the elected members) on the Mt Pleasant Avenue site.

The alternatives of modernising the Town Hall and replacing it nearby could be similar in overall cost – at least if the constraints of the listing are respected. If they acquire a new building for their own use the Council will have an unmodernised listed building to dispose of. If, on the other hand, the Town Hall was modernised by removing partitions etc., it could be subdivided to make space surplus to the Council’s own requirements available for commercial or possibly residential use. There would also be the site at Mt Pleasant Avenue for disposal.

The Council is under continuing pressure to alter the way it works to achieve further economies. We accept this may mean radical changes. We recognise that decisions about accommodation must reflect such changes, not the other way round. The Society continues to advocate a modernised Town Hall, incorporating the Gateway, as a lively centre for all our community. Among other benefits this would mean personal users of Council services, at present served from the Gateway, being treated as voters and taxpayers, with a relationship with those they elect and those who work for them.

Alastair Tod
DO YOU ...

Know what a Dead Man’s Penny is? Do you own one?

The ‘Dead Man’s Penny’, or Memorial Plaque, was issued after the First World War to the next-of-kin of all British and Empire service personnel who were killed as a result of the war. 1,350,000 plaques were issued.

DO YOU ...

Have photos of Tunbridge Wells (scenes, events or people) in the period 1900-1920?

Have ancestors who lived in Tunbridge Wells, or in the immediate area, who served in whatever capacity during the War?

Have diaries/letters relating to the period and Tunbridge Wells?

IF SO ...

We would ask you to get in touch with either John Cunningham (534599) or Chris Jones (522025) because you might be able to help in the latest Local History Group project which is to publish a new monograph “Tunbridge Wells in the First World War” in November 2014.

If you are in any doubt whether what you have is suitable or relevant, don’t hesitate to get in touch - let John or Chris be the judge.

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council also produced a commemorative medallion - at the time of the Peace Conference in 1919. Copies were given to those returning to civilian life after active service.
One of the proposals in the Borough Council’s cultural strategy document is to develop and implement a public art policy. This article draws attention to a remarkable collection of existing public art in Tunbridge Wells that is little known and rarely visited.

It has its origins in a major event in local life in 1873 - the opening of the new Frant Forest cemetery at Hawkenbury - later prosaically renamed Tunbridge Wells Borough Cemetery and Kent and Sussex Crematorium.

Designed by William Brentnall the town surveyor, it was described as “one of the most beautiful cemeteries in England”. Its landscaping and historic memorials have over the years, like the earlier much smaller Woodbury Park Cemetery, become a major Tunbridge Wells heritage site and peaceful green haven for wildlife. A dwindling number of Woodbury Park burials in existing graves continued up till 1934 so that for 60 years the two burial grounds worked in parallel and many local families have members in both cemeteries.

Though linked by history and shared features, one major difference in the character of the Hawkenbury burial ground is immediately obvious when walking round - the sculptures. Woodbury memorials mostly use simple designs, their ornamentation decorously limited to floral or classical symbols. As the new grave plots at Hawkenbury began to come into use, this approach changed. By the eighteen seventies elaborate funerals and expensive memorials had become a marker of social standing, and the citizens of Tunbridge Wells were not backward in making their public statements. Before long a varied host of angels, who might have found it difficult to gain entrance under the strict rule of Canon Hoare at Woodbury Park Cemetery, had taken up residence.

Passionflowers - popular Christian symbolism.
Imagination was allowed to roam freely with elaborately sculptured stones and statues creating burial bling. What all this has so happily bequeathed to us today is a magnificent sculpture park of Victorian and Edwardian public art.

Nowadays most people prefer cremation to burial, and commemorative planting to elaborate gravestones. Expense and stricter burial ground rules mean that generations to come are unlikely to inherit such a range of sculptural treasures. All the more reason to treasure and conserve those that the past has provided. How unfortunate that Hawkenbury mourners today no longer traverse a landscape of venerable memorials surrounding dignified chapels. Instead they have to follow a screened-off road leading to a utilitarian 1960s building that turns its back on the surrounding cemetery vistas. Small wonder that most visitors to the crematorium are quite unaware of the 140 years of history and art that surround them.

But there are plans to improve matters with a proposed rebuild of the crematorium chapel area. This will offer opportunities to change things for the better. For the past three years a small group launched by the Local History Group of the Civic Society has been transcribing, researching and photographing the oldest memorials. Booklets are being prepared with suggested walks round some of these. The group has now recorded some 1000 memorials in the area lying between the twin burial chapels and the crematorium.

Oh grave where is thy victory?.

Unity and affection even after death.
walks are being planned for September’s Heritage Open Days and ideas being developed for further cultural uses for the disused chapel. We hope a great many people will want to be part of the new Friends group, which will work closely with the Friends of Woodbury Park Cemetery and the Civic Society especially on history research and memorial conservation. So do get involved right away to help us plan this launch and to become a Founder Member of the Friends of Hawkenbury Cemetery. More information available from June Bridgeman, on T/W 525578 or jbman@btinternet.com.

On the following pages, June looks at one particular family buried at Hawkenbury.

Originally these chapels catered separately for anglicans and non conformists but religious apartheid here is now a thing of the past with all services conducted in one of them. On Saturday 7th June both chapels will once again be open for the launch of the new Friends of Hawkenbury Cemetery and an accompanying exhibition and guided walk. The distinctive outline of these chapels will form the logo for the new Friends Group, whose aims will be to work with the Council to protect, conserve and enhance the whole cemetery.

Photographic displays and guided
Allison Fairbairn and her Children

June Bridgeman investigates one family group at Hawkenbury Cemetery and finds links to the Pre-Raphaelites and early concern for disabled people.

Allison, widow of Sir Thomas Fairbairn, and three of their children - Constance, Arthur and James - lie buried at Hawkenbury, next to the conspicuous mausoleum of Eliza Hogg. To our great advantage two separate Pre-Raphaelite masterpieces depict how these four people looked during the 1860s and the style in which they lived.

On display at Torre Abbey in Torquay, the sumptuous family portrait (below), 7x5 feet in size, commissioned by Sir Thomas from Holman Hunt in 1864, shows Allison Fairbairn surrounded by her progeny, Thomas, Reginald, Florence, Mary and James. Lewis Carroll dubbed this “The childrens holiday” - a name that stuck. It radiates Victorian wealth and status with the “perfect mother” at its heart, set in an idyllic rural landscape. Florence in the foreground hugs her little brother James. Thomas on the right adopts a dignified pose fondling his dog, Reginald in the distance looks after his little sister Mary.

But missing from this depiction of an ideal family are the two eldest children, Constance and Arthur both of whom were born deaf - and thus in those days dumb. They had been sent away to be schooled in deaf and dumb signing and other skills to help them get through life. When Arthur inherited the baronetcy in 1891, and acted as one of his father’s executors he promptly - and perhaps revealingly - gave this picture away to a second cousin.

However Constance and Arthur had already been sitters for another of their father’s proteges. In 1861 Sir Thomas had commissioned a touching white marble sculpture “Brother and Sister” from Thomas Woolner which was displayed in the

Great Exhibition of 1862 and became the subject of a poem by Browning. It depicts Arthur aged 9 with his sister Constance aged 10 clinging together in a world of their own. Following Constance’s funeral in 1904 in the cemetery chapel, this statue became her memorial, set under a delicate canopy made by Burslem’s. Sadly, since it was photographed in situ in the 1970’s by the Courtauld Fine Art Institute, only the canopy remains. It has disappeared without trace.

Throughout their lives Arthur and his sister both worked tirelessly supporting projects and events to help others who suffered the same affliction as themselves. Arthur was described with warm affection as intelligent, cheerful, handsome and a smart dresser with a “certain penchant for colourful ties”. He was also a keen horseman, angler, cricketer and photographer. An inveterate traveller abroad and collector of curios, he used his trips to study other countries arrangements to help the deaf and dumb. He died in 1915 at Dulcote, 33 Broadwater Down, after a bad bout of influenza. His picture and obituary in the Kent and Sussex Courier were surrounded by a local gallery of the mounting war casualties. At his funeral at St Marks Church his coffin was carried by bearers who were deaf and dumb, as were many of the large congregation, and the valedictory address was accompanied by sign language as had been those of his mother and sister before him. The vicar of Holy Trinity had been so struck by this in 1907 that he installed a telephone from his pulpit to selected pews in order to assist the hard of hearing. It has taken some 100 years since then to move that initiative along much further. JB

‘Constance and Arthur’, by Thomas Woolner, 1862. The Fairbairn’s two eldest children. The sculpture formed part of their memorial in Hawkenbury, but has disappeared.
It all started for me many years ago with a benign-looking gentleman in Madam Tussauds’ Chamber of Horrors. Respectably dressed, round-faced and with a slight smile, William Palmer did not look like he belonged there. But he certainly did, by all accounts: one of the first mass-murderers in Victorian Britain, a respectable Midlands doctor who poisoned relatives and friends wholesale in the 1850s because he was in financial difficulties and wanted to benefit from the insurance he had kindly taken out on their behalf. Charles Dickens who watched Palmer’s trial over 12 days in 1856 described him as the worst murderer who ever stood in the Old Bailey dock and wrote to his friend John Forster that he was having nightmares: Palmer was so ordinary that everywhere the novelist looked he could see people just like him. When the murderer was hanged outside Stafford Jail, 30,000 people turned up to watch and the railway companies organised excursion trains to get them there in time. As a slice of mid-Victorian life, it was all rather intriguing: a story which had not been much written about for many years, but which, as I discovered in researching it in local and national archives, had much to tell modern readers about Victorian morality, medicine, journalism, law, policing, horse racing, insurance – and poison.

For nearly 160 years Palmer’s story has not been much challenged: that he murdered his wife, four baby children, his brother, his best friend and several other acquaintances: maybe a dozen in all, probably with strychnine, a then newly-discovered poison and that he had calmly watched them writhing to death. He was only caught after the stepfather of his last victim, his friend John Parsons Cook, turned up and demanded to know how the young man had died, a week after his horse had won Cook £3,000 at Shrewsbury Races, money (equivalent to perhaps £180,000 today) which had all somehow disappeared. There was a badly botched autopsy, which Palmer did his best to ruin, but the pioneering forensic pathologist Alfred Swaine Taylor gave crucial evidence to convict him of Cook’s murder, even though he had not been able to discover any trace of poison in the body. Palmer, who did not speak at his trial, went to his death denying that he had poisoned his friend by strychnine: which left open the possibility that he had poisoned him with something else, or not at all.

My research for what I initially thought
was a piece of Victorian gothic melodrama: screams in the night and flickering candles at midnight in a Midlands coaching inn, turned out rather differently. As a journalist myself, it was intriguing to see how the case was written up at the time, using language and reporting just as extravagant and even more prejudicial than you might see today. The reporters were all anonymous (I thought) but they routinely referred to Palmer as a monster long before he ever came to trial and salaciously reported every local rumour about him as fact. Palmer was not helped by the fact that newspaper stamp duty had been repealed six months before his arrest and newspapers had been able drastically to reduce their prices amid fierce competition for circulation. Trying to discover the identity of one of the reporters I came across Henry Mayhew’s name in the trial transcript, in an exchange between Swaine Taylor and Palmer’s barrister Serjeant Shee who was trying to prove that the pathologist had given a prejudicial interview to Mayhew before the trial. Mayhew’s name is a famous one of course: the author of pioneering interviews with working class Londoners: London Labour and the London Poor, which is still mined by historians for its vivid documentary depiction of life in the 1850s. But it was not Henry who was sent up to Staffordshire to report the case; it was his younger brother Augustus, a now wholly forgotten journalist, as became clear when I came across the autobiography of their editor at the Illustrated Times, Henry Vizetelly, whose memoirs, published in the 1890s, devote a whole chapter to the Palmer trial. In it, 40 years afterwards, Vizetelly admitted the pre-trial prejudice had been outrageous (“one cannot but express one’s amazement that three-quarters of a million copies were allowed to be sold...for so outrageous a contempt of
occurs, you must thank yourself.” By this time, Palmer owed £23,000 and was desperate. He was also being blackmailed by his mistress, as a little cache of 34 notes in his handwriting in the William Salt archive library in Stafford reveal: scarcely longer than a modern Tweet, they were dashed off to a woman called Jane during his last summer of freedom: calls for assignations, lewd jokes, even, chillingly, the arrangement of what looks suspiciously like an abortion and finally the handing over of £40 in return for the letters – which clearly, somehow, never got handed back to him, perhaps by then he had been arrested. So one woman got away.

The story all these documents tell is not that Palmer was innocent, rather that his story was more complex and interesting than Gus Mayhew’s version. But it may take a while to overturn the tale he told, which helped turn William Palmer into one of the great Victorian villains.

Stephen Bates is a member of the Local History Group. He is currently working with the team researching life in Tunbridge Wells during the First World War.

His book The Poisoner will be published by Duckworth in June 2014.

He has recently published another book Penny Loaves and Butter Cheap, about life in the year 1846 (see right).
Readers are no doubt aware that there is a working group within the Town Forum seeking to encourage the development of tourism in the town. The group is keen to build upon the town’s heritage and its long history as an ‘inland watering-place’.

One suggestion is to recreate the Tunbridge biscuit. They mean, of course, the water biscuits made by Romary’s, initially in Church Road, but later at a Rowntree’s factory in Glasgow. However, as I explained in last Summer’s Newsletter, the name Tunbridge had long been given to biscuits made elsewhere in Britain and America. The advertisement (left) is from Huntley and Palmers of Reading. The Tunbridge biscuit is the oval one with scalloped edges in the centre.

On the subject of tourism, I came across some advice to the town in the pages of The Builder in May 1857. They had been reporting on the construction of two new churches, and had taken the opportunity to make a visit.

They were concerned about the condition of the Well, and suggested that if those who regulated the affairs of places of resort like Tunbridge Wells were wise, they would be “kept clean and wholesome in appearance”. They had found the Well to be littered with pieces of paper, sticks and other rubbish.

They further considered that “The ‘High Rocks’, the most attractive sight in the neighbourhood, want a little artistic care. A very beer-shoppy aspect has been given to this beautiful morsel of wayward Nature by some vulgar erections and perverse arrangement.” And they complained that Penshurst was only open to the public on one day a week.

Let the Borough Council guard against beer-shoppy aspects.
2014 marks the centenary of the King Charles Parish Hall, built as an amenity for the parish and town, a function it performs fully to this day.

In 1914 the oldest church in Tunbridge Wells, yet youngest parish, found itself alone among the town’s parish churches without a parish hall so the vicar of the day, Arthur Oliver, set about finding supporters and garnering funds to this end. Since 1911 the church had had a parish room in Berkeley Road, Mount Sion but the need for a proper hall had been identified so in 1913 a building committee was formed, an architect (Stanley Philpot) was appointed and by May of that year plans had been submitted to the town council for approval. A site for the hall was identified and gifted to the parish by the Marquess of Abergavenny, significant landowner in the southern part of Tunbridge Wells as well as chair of the Trustees of King Charles Church. Fund raising and a bank loan followed, with council approval of the plans granted by October 1913 and tenders for building invited.

Stanley Philpot (1879 – 1943), a Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects, had commenced independent practice in the town in 1905, having experienced a varied apprenticeship and training with the Tunbridge Wells architect Herbert Murton Caley (a future mayor of Tunbridge Wells), and with Charles Beeston (of Ormskirk), Ernest Bates (of the prominent local building firm chosen to build the parish hall), John Jarvis and, for a four year stint, with a Mr Brinson at a time when he was responsible for the architectural features of the naval hospital at Chatham. At one time he was in partnership with Goulburn Lovell.

Philpot, described as “a King Charles man” by the Bishop of Rochester when formally opening the parish hall on 17 December 1914, was the son of a Pantiles boot and shoe maker, a business continued by Philpot’s sister, Gertrude. Philpot, educated at Skinner’s School in the town, practised his profession in the local area where he designed many of the business houses in the town as well as some of the large houses in the surrounding area. He often worked with well known local building firms such as T Bates & Sons and C H Strange, the latter being one of Philpot’s proposers for his professional architectural qualification in July 1911. A short appreciation of his life in the Kent and Sussex Courier (November 5, 1943) described him as one of Tunbridge Wells’ “best known, thorough and painstaking architects”.

The parish hall’s foundation or memorial stone was laid by the Marquess of Abergavenny on June 29 1914, the
event extensively reported in the Courier edition of July 3. The connected church service, described as “fully choral”, was conducted by the Archdeacon of Tonbridge (the Ven A T Scott), assisted by the Vicar of King Charles the Martyr church and the Revd J A Patrick. The memorial stone, today worn and covered for protection against the weather, reads: “TO THE GLORY OF GOD THIS MEMORIAL STONE OF KING CHARLES THE MARTYR’S CHURCH HALL WAS LAID ON JUNE 29TH 1914 BY THE MOST HONOURABLE THE MARQUESS OF ABERGAVENNY KG BY WHOM THE SITE WAS GENEROUSLY GIVEN. Today a copy of the inscription can be seen in the hall’s entrance lobby.

In a brief speech, the 88 year old Marquess expressed the hope that the hall would help the church and its parishioners materially, and reminisced as to “the old church in days gone by … when it was known as Pope’s Chapel”. The Courier went on to report that “he knew it by that name for many years, and almost wished that it still retained that old name”. The printed service sheet included a statement from the Vicar and a letter from the Bishop of Rochester, who had been unable to attend owing to a prior commitment.

The plans for the new building included a hall (with seating for 250 people), rooms for the Men’s Institute, Boys’ Club, Girls’ Club, Sunday school teachers, cloakrooms, kitchen accommodation and a caretaker’s residence. The hall would also serve as a drill hall for the boys of King Charles School. The hall was built in two parts, as funds allowed, with the caretaker’s residence and the Girls’ Club and class rooms added, the foundations for these facilities already marked out by the time of the official opening of the hall on December 17 1914.

T Bates & Sons had won the bid to build the hall, having come in with the
lowest price of £2,630, with the second phase costing an additional £630, making a total building cost of £3,260. The Courier noted that the costs included a relatively high amount for the foundations, at £450, “owing to the bad formation of the ground and the necessity to build over the bed of a stream”.

While the hall had been designed and built for peace time activities, its completion was at a time of world war, with the Tunbridge Wells’ mayor commenting (at its official opening) that the hall “was to be used immediately for military purposes, chiefly as a recreation room for the soldiers, and that afterwards one part of its usefulness would be as a drill hall for the boys”. The Courier also noted that “the hall was tastefully decorated with flags, the national emblems of all the Allies being exhibited”. A Mrs Van Roalte also generously donated a grand piano, no doubt used by the troops who, according to the King Charles Church parish magazine of February 1915, were making good use of the hall – writing letters, playing games and listening to music. The hall was returned to the parish after military use in May 1919, the parish receiving nearly £15 from the War Department for dilapidations.

After the hostilities of World War One, the hall was designated a War Memorial dedicated “to those connected with this parish who fell in the Great War” by the Archdeacon of Tonbridge at a special service on July 7 1921. The memorial list of parishioners killed in action can still be seen in the entrance lobby.

The hall accounts (which can be viewed in the Kent County archives in Maidstone) reveal a little of the activities providing income for the hall to offset its running expenses. In the early 1920s the hall was used by concert parties; boys’ club; girls’ club; Murray House school; for theatricals; dancing; and by the Band of Hope. By 1939 and the approach of World War Two, the hall was hired for a variety of activities including: the League of Health and Beauty; “Peanuts” children’s concerts; Men’s whist; Oxford Extension lectures; Orphan’s Charity; District Nurses; NSPCC; “Dig for Victory”; Homefront Club; and the Gardeners’ Association.

The hall continued to pay for itself into the 1950s, for example for the year 1951 turnover was £472, expenses £251 and the balance at the bank had reached £221. The hall fared less well in the 1960s with expenses exceeding income and the need
for short term loans from the Parochial Church Council to tide the hall over from one year to the next.

In more recent times, the hall has very adequately been able to cover its expenses, thanks to the work of the hall hire staff and the loyalty of its regular hirers; and nowadays having tenants in the hall flat, originally the caretaker’s home, provides further rental income. A building indeed that continues to fulfil its intended purpose and the expectations demanded of it as it moves into its second century. DB

I started work in Tunbridge Wells in 1970 and have lived in the town since 1981. I know nothing about architecture but reckon I can recognise a good development when I see it. I have been impressed by the strategy of recent committees whereby they are very keen to get the best for the town and its residents. They have been willing to embrace the new where it will improve things and not look to preserve the past simply for the sake of it.

Recently I did the advertising for the Spa Valley Railway and this led me to ask “Why should anyone want to spend a day (or preferably more) in Tunbridge Wells”? You might like to think of answers to this question and then consider what is currently being done to promote our town. From this you can deduce that I am very keen to see tourism developed with Tunbridge Wells being both a destination for visitors in its own right and as a base from which they can visit the numerous attractions nearby.

I live near Broadwater Down and make frequent trips to the Pantiles and the town centre on foot, by bus and occasionally by car. I am therefore well acquainted with the traffic and parking issues we have here.

I sense that the Civic Society is becoming increasingly recognised as a force for good and I know that it has some highly qualified people who give their time willingly for the common good. Given my earlier comment about my architectural expertise, I do not expect to play any role in planning or choosing annual awards. I feel I can best serve the committee by taking on some administrative tasks thus releasing the experts to devote their time to the key issues. However, this won’t stop me from getting involved in the promotion of tourism and any issues regarding transport. Finally, I am quite prepared to challenge proposals, not necessarily because I don’t like them but to ensure that they have been properly thought through. The question “Why?” can be remarkably powerful.
Mission is the protection and conservation of significant historic parks and gardens throughout the county. Back in the 1990s, it produced a register of relevant sites, and in 2009 work was begun to research and record them in more detail, culminating in the issue of formal reports to TWBC and Sevenoaks District Council. This project underpins tonight’s subject, “Investigations into Historic Gardens of Tunbridge Wells”, presented by Hugh Vaux.

“Tenterden is a market town, and a singularly bright spot. It consists of one street which is, in some places, more than two hundred feet wide. The afternoon was fine and, just as I rose the hill and entered the street, the people had come out of church. I saw, drawn out before me the dress and beauty of the town; and a great many very very pretty girls I saw.”

William Cobbett 31st August 1823

Registration opens at 9:15, and the conference proper starts at 9:45. There are three presentations in the morning:

“Shipbuilding in Smallhithe - on the cutting edge of medieval technology”
“Tenterden’s timber-framed buildings”
“Some Tenterden men on the Somme”

After lunch there is a choice of walks around the town, visiting the parish church, museum, town hall and Unitarian church. The price of £18 includes ploughman’s lunch (£10 without lunch). Booking is essential. For details please contact Chris Jones - email / phone no. on page 3.

Programme Notes  Continued from opposite

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Our programme of talks for members in the second quarter of 2014 sees the venues divided again between the Town Hall and the Royal Wells Hotel on Mount Ephraim, so please be sure to refer to your programme card before setting off each time, and keep an eye on our website just in case of last-minute changes. This next set of talks continues to meet our objective of covering a good variety of mainly local subjects spread across a broad timespan.

For the talk to be given in the Town Hall on 10th April, we are very pleased to welcome back a former member of our Executive Committee, John Minnis, who now works as a Senior Investigator for English Heritage and is based in Cambridge. John’s illustrated presentation, entitled “Carscapes: The Motor Car, Architecture and Landscape” is devoted to a subject in which he is now one of the country’s leading experts, having co-written in 2012 a book of that name dealing with the car’s impact on the physical environment of England, from the arrival of the first motor car in 1895 to the modern motorway network. He has also compiled the more recent “England’s Motoring Heritage from the Air”. Special attention is given to our local area for tonight’s presentation, covering listed filling-stations, car workshops and showrooms, extravagant private garages such as those at Salomons, and “an intriguing ‘submerged’ garage in a back garden that is unknown to almost everyone.”

By contrast, Terry Whitling’s talk in the Royal Wells Hotel on 8th May covers several hundred years in describing “The History and Conservation of Westenhanger Castle and Medieval Barns.” The castle is a Scheduled Ancient Monument with a Grade 1 listed house; evidence of Roman occupation has been discovered on the site which adjoins Folkestone racecourse. Defensive towers and high curtain wall were built around 1400, and by 1544 the extensive house incorporated separate suites of rooms for the use of royalty. (Queen Elizabeth I referred to ‘her house at Westenhanger’). Following a long period of neglect, English Heritage has helped with financial assistance to repair and restore the stonework. The nearby medieval barns incorporate extravagant design elements: the hammerbeam roof, made from oak, is the type of construction usually associated with high status buildings such as Westminster Hall. Adding to its splendour, it spans the East Stour stream and has four full height wagon porch doors.

On 12th June we meet at the Town Hall to learn about the work of the Kent Gardens Trust, a body whose aims and workload have much in common with those of the Civic Society in that, among other things, it responds to planning applications on sites potentially at risk from ill-thought-out development plans. The Trust’s overall...
Meetings start at 7.30pm on the second Thursday in the month (unless otherwise stated) in the Town Hall or the Royal Wells Hotel. 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apr 10th</td>
<td>‘Carscapes: the motor car, architecture and landscapes’ - former committee member, John Minnis, now of English Heritage, on an unusual topic, with special reference to our area. <strong>Town Hall</strong></td>
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<td>May 8th</td>
<td>‘The History and Conservation of Westenhanger Castle and Medieval Barns’ - an illustrated explanation of a remarkable project by Terry Whitling. <strong>Royal Wells Hotel</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>June 12th</td>
<td>‘Investigations into Historic Gardens of Tunbridge Wells’ - Hugh Vaux of the Kent Gardens Trust shows us an examples of work done locally by this organisation. <strong>Town Hall</strong></td>
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<td>July</td>
<td>Proposed Visit to <strong>Greenwich</strong>. Details in the next edition.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aug 9th</td>
<td><strong>Annual Garden Party</strong> At <strong>Blackhurst Park</strong> by kind permission of Graham and Gilly Charlwood. Details in the next edition.</td>
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For a preview of the talks, please see page 23.

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.

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