

Summer 2010



Royal Tunbridge Wells

CIVIC SOCIETY

Newsletter



We were shocked to hear of the recent unexpected death of Daniel Bech. For the last ten years he and Katharina have campaigned strenuously and successfully to improve the appearance and facilities of the town. It was not done for personal glory but for the benefit of all those who appreciate Tunbridge Wells. We feel a deep personal sadness at his loss.

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Editor: Chris Jones. 52 St James Road, Tunbridge Wells, TN1 2LB
Tel 01892 522025 (evenings and weekends) Email clissold.jones@btinternet.com
Secretary: Christo Skelton. 4 Caxton House, 19 Mount Sion, Tunbridge Wells TN1
1UB. Tel 01892 513241 Email christo.skelton@gmail.com



Personally Speaking

by Chris Jones

Memories of 1959... Those of you who were around in 1959 will remember that in March of that year the BBC broadcast a short programme called 'The Road to Ruin' featuring Walter Coltham and his concerns about Pembury Road. The BBC still have the film, and used a small part of it in a recent broadcast about Civic Voice. The extract, about 40 seconds long, also includes Peter Gibby and Joan (?) Lawrence. If you would like to see it and have access to the Internet then try the following address: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/8626748.stm>. We aren't sure how long the extract will remain on-line, so don't wait too long to try it.

Saskatchewan ... Another web-site that you might find interesting is: <http://drc.usask.ca/projects/walks/index.html>. It's an analysis of Thomas Baker's 1703 play *Tunbridge Walks; or, The Yeoman of Kent*, by students of the University of Saskatchewan. How global everything is these days. It's got a very full bibliography, which is well worth studying. The person in charge, Prof. Ronald

Cooling has written a further interesting article on Benge Burr's motivation in telling the story of Lord North's discovery of the Wells.

Town Hall.. We are all concerned about the future of the Town Hall - see Alastair's article on page 6. But the threat may be much wider than the Town Hall itself. The rest of the Civic Centre - the Assembly Hall, Police Station (left), Library and AEC may also have been promised to the developers. If you are concerned about these proposals, or if you are concerned that you haven't been told about what is going on, then please write to your councillors and MP. They can only act for you if they are aware of your concerns.



From the Planning Scrutineers

by Gill Twells



Site of former Strawberry Hill House ... Permission is again being sought for the redevelopment of this site at the corner of Broadwater Down and Eridge Road. The Abergavenny lodge house here was demolished some time ago to enable redevelopment with new blocks of flats (some were refused and one approved).

This time two new semi-detached pairs of houses are proposed. Although we objected to redevelopment before the demolition of the original lodge house, we decided not to oppose this proposal which we considered appropriately designed. However, to our surprise, we find that it has been refused - for a number of reasons, one of the main ones being that it “fails to provide an element of small and intermediate dwellings”.

Site in South East corner of Cambridge Gardens... This is another place where redevelopment (of out-dated garages) with new housing has previously been approved - on appeal - but a different combination of dwellings is now being proposed (6 / 2-bed flats) - in a design which we consider will do justice to the Conservation Area. However, this proposal has now been withdrawn.

Blackhurst Park, Halls Hole Road ... When the NHS health authority vacated this building - which they used as offices - it was converted to flats and we gave the conversion a Conservation Award in 1996. However, a terrace of cottages within the site remained unaltered and it is now proposed to convert them to larger houses by combining pairs and adding an extension. We consider that this is a very appropriate development and we are looking forward to the result. The decision on the application is still “pending”.

Heathervale House, Vale Avenue... This is an extraordinary proposal to add two new floors of residential accommodation on top of a modern office building, which faces the entrance to the multi-storey carpark above Safeway/Morrisons former store. The applicants state that they have found a new light-weight construction method which is specially designed for such a proposition. But we consider that it is a most unsuitable location for new flats and have written to recommend refusal. The decision is still “pending”.

Not for Sale



Alastair Tod asks: 'What's going on at the Town Hall?'

The Society's concern about the wish of the Council to move its Town Hall activities to somewhere less central goes back some time. This concern was intensified by the creation of the Gateway for counter services, and its effective separation from Town Hall activities they referred to as 'back office'. This culminated in the unilateral closure of the Town Hall to the public.

When the Society heard last year that the Land Registry building in Hawkenbury was likely to be vacated we asked the Leader of the Council about his plans. He assured us that the building was unsuitable for the Council's use, and also remarked he could not envisage using reserves to acquire it. However we remembered the Council's wish to abandon the Town Hall, and observed it changing its rules to enable it to invest in property - 'to guard against inflation'.

This spring without publicity the Council took part in a project Total Place with a proposal to the Treasury to move the Town Hall to the Land Registry building, and collocate there with other bodies, including probably KCC Social Services, the police, tax authority, and some administrative functions of the NHS. (Interestingly

these bodies were said to have difficulty separating 'back-office' from their customer-facing role). The purpose of Total Place was to integrate personal services to avoid duplication and simplify delivery, in the cause of making public sector savings.

When shortly before the election the Society saw the proposal we wrote to the Leader and those standing for re-election in Royal Tunbridge Wells asking about the apparent change of stance. We questioned how duplication would be saved by sharing space with police, tax and NHS bodies, and how this related to the Council recently hiving off some of its own staff to the Gateway. We also felt the 'back-office' approach overlooked the function of the Town Hall as a democratic and ceremonial centre of the community and the need for the professional staff to be available to the public.

At a subsequent meeting we were told that the report was confidential and we should never have seen it, that it was 'only an exercise' and no decisions had been taken, and that anyway the Town Hall building was incapable of being modernised – the internal walls were 'concrete'. We commented that in a climate of cost-cutting a proposal to the Treasury was likely to be seen as a blue-print for

action, whatever decisions had been taken. If the building could not be modernised for Council use what could it be used for? Were we in fact looking at demolition of a unique listed civic complex?

A source then showed us a detailed plan drawn up by leading architects on behalf of the Council. This showed there were no structural reasons why the building could not be completely modernised (most of the internal walls are non-structural, and the ceiling heights permit the introduction of computer cabling, air-conditioning ducts, disabled access etc); the plan included a one-stop shop (Gateway) within the existing building envelope, while making space for a significant increase in staff; the work (adjusted for inflation) was costed at little over half the cost of replacement (or apparently moving to Hawkenbury).

The Cabinet denies it but we have

seen the minute of a decision to buy the Land Registry with reserves, and the Council's regeneration partners claim they have been promised the Town Hall site as a 'redevelopment opportunity'. We don't know how much land has been promised, but the recently published Town Centre Action Plan shows a very large site indeed could be involved. We don't know the arrangements with other freeholders such as KCC, or the cost of rehousing their activities. And we don't know what value the developer puts on the site, or whether his development would include replacing the cultural elements of the complex.

In the absence of so much information a complete assessment of the proposal is not possible but the Society is deeply sceptical of adding another 'redevelopment opportunity' at the Council's expense to the Cinema site across the road. **A.T.**





Chairman's Letter

Tunbridge Wells
June 2010

Your Society was said the other day to consist of 'old people in committees'. Well, first a confession: some of us have seen a few summers and our approach is relatively democratic. Your one and only Committee, which any member can join, meets monthly with a very detailed agenda; what we do and how we do it is openly agreed there. We are available to advise the Council whenever they wish.....

In fact, we respond to events and most Society activities take place between meetings; discussion in committee is the beginning not the end of these. 'Events, dear boy, events', in the words of a former prime minister. If this is June, it must be the Town Hall, which I report on elsewhere in this newsletter.

Last month it was the bandstand, and we have also raised your voice recently on the Tourist Information Centre, the Cinema site, front garden parking, the A21, and the Core Strategy. We research history, scrutinise plans, respond to policy documents which affect our community, and give advice where we can to individuals. All this, and monthly 'members' meetings' (actually open to the public), the garden party (coming up shortly), and visits (this year to Faversham).

In all these activities we respond to what you tell us. We are proud of the fact that so many members have relevant professional qualifications and experience. Some of the questions speakers are asked at our meetings must seem alarmingly well-informed, on matters as specialised as the financing cost of the Pembury Hospital PFI.

It's a great strength for the Society to have such a range. But we're not content with even these resources, and are planning a major recruitment drive this autumn, with the particular aim of attracting some younger members. I know from going about the town how many people are 'almost members' - they agree strongly with what we do but shy away from actually signing up. If you know any almost-members, do urge them to overcome

their inhibitions: even if they don't want anything else from us, in future they will have to pay £2 a time to attend members' meetings.

I wrote last month about the bandstand, and why your Society sees this as important now (not as unkindly suggested because we are remembering ladies promenading with parasols). As expected, consent was given to demolish the present structure (incidentally a photo of the victory celebrations in 1945 shows the bandstand already rebuilt at this time – so the work was done during the war).

The Council is now letting contracts for the demolition and has generously agreed to salvage any materials that could be used in a reconstruction. We are anxious to take up this offer and are investigating where at least the terra cotta facing of the base could be stored. When events permit, we look forward to launching an appeal for funds, and meanwhile the presence of the salvaged material will remind us and others what we are aiming for.

Alastair Tod



The unveiling of the Civic Society's contribution to Bloom on 29th May. The Mayor and Mayoress with Brian Senior, Cathy Hampson and Alastair Tod. The planting was designed by Richard Still.

Heritage Open Days - Items of Special Interest

St Philip's Church, Birken Road. If you knew nothing of the history of the Tunbridge Wells area before the Wells were discovered, you'll enjoy an exhibition about the neighbourhood of St Philip's Church. Linda Glanville, has delved – literally - into the history of the area at the time of the Knights Hospitaller. Her research findings, including archaeological material, will be on display, with an invitation for younger visitors to touch as well as look.

Christ Church, Church Road, Kildown. This Victorian church, originally a plain building, now has an interior lavishly decorated in the Gothic style. The stunning wood marquetry panels made by craftsmen from the Bedgebury Estate are the focus of an informative display by Goudhurst and Kildown Historical Society.

Three new guided walks: Those who enjoy discovering the history of the area in the company of a knowledgeable guide have several new options this year. Join Dennis Penfold of Rusthall Historical Society in the Toad Rock and Denny Bottom neighbourhood or Joy Podbury in Old Speldhurst. Ian Beavis – a fount of historical information about all the public open spaces in the town – will introduce you to the history of the Grosvenor and Hilbert Recreation Ground.

Corn Exchange Chess Challenge. Hastings and Tunbridge Wells clubs first met in 1908. This year's match will be accompanied by heritage displays and may include simultaneous chess (one team member taking on all comers).

Woodhurst, Old Kent Road, Paddock Wood. Last year Sarah Hamilton opened her fascinating private house in Paddock Wood, which is largely unaltered since the 1940s. Paddock Wood Historical Society will be providing a display about the history of the town to add to Sarah's material on the history of her house and family.

St Thomas's Southborough has an extensive history display marking their 150th anniversary. Their research into the people of the parish has unearthed several surprises. One is the tale of a Southborough doctor, Henry Colebrook, commemorated in a stained glass window. The respected doctor turns out to have been the illegitimate son of a top East India Company official with a distinctly shady past. Henry came to England and was brought up at Colebrook Park in Tunbridge Wells after his father was expelled from the East Indian Company in disgrace.

Look out for leaflets about the programme - there will be about forty venues in and around Tunbridge Wells. For further details, including any booking arrangements, see the website: www.tunbridgewellsheritageopendays.org. Booking generally opens on 1 September..

Heritage Open Days - Help Requested

Fiona Woodfield, who is co-ordinating the Heritage Open Day programme in and around Tunbridge Wells, would like your help. Please contact her on 01892 544429 or e mail woodfieldfiona@hotmail.com if you can assist with these requests.

Liaison... We need two or three more people, each to liaise with a small number of property owners or event organisers in Royal Tunbridge Wells, taking a batch of leaflets to each venue, sorting out any queries, and checking all is going smoothly on the day(s). Ideally you should be free sometime in mid August (when the leaflets should be available) and on the weekend of Thursday 9 to Sunday 12 September.

Distribution... Would you be willing to distribute leaflets in your road or – even better – in a few neighbouring streets? First, we would like volunteers now, so we can plan for the mid August distribution. For this, please contact Fiona no later than the end of July. With available funding we cannot aim for 100% leaflet coverage every year. So, secondly, it would also be helpful if at 1 September (the booking day for venues with limited capacity) you find your street has not received a leaflet, you could ring Fiona and arrange to collect any remaining stocks to leaflet your street.

Away on holiday? If you are going to be away for the weekend of Heritage Open Days that is no excuse not to get involved! We know we have two holiday makers from our locality who will be looking out for Heritage Open Days venues and events in Cumbria and Yorkshire. So do keep an eye out for events at your holiday destination. Heritage Open Days is a Europe wide event. (But check carefully as it may not be exactly the same dates in each country – for example some events in France are definitely a few days later than here in the UK). If you enjoy a Heritage Open Days event elsewhere, ask yourself whether it is something we could do in Tunbridge Wells. Are there any tips we can pick up? Let Fiona know.

Have a weekend away... Fiona would like to find some volunteers with analytical minds and loads of imagination. The mission is to spend Heritage Open Days in Brighton. Just like the Tunbridge Wells programme, the Brighton and Hove programme was first centrally co-ordinated in 2006. Now it has something like three times as many events. There seems to be a particular emphasis on house history. Would you be willing to head down there, try to work out the reasons for their amazing expansion and accumulate as many ideas as you can that might work in Tunbridge Wells. Please let Fiona know if you are interested in helping with this. **F.W.**



Starting Young

The Society has been considering what it can do to encourage an awareness of the town and its history amongst young people. Ruth Adams (left) explains what she has already achieved in a local school.

Pupils in Class 3/4 at Broadwater Primary School in Tunbridge Wells have been learning about the history of their home town. The aim of the study was to instil an interest and passion for the past and to help children make sense of their town in the present day.

At the beginning of the project the children were asked to undertake a very simple task, to share their knowledge about Tunbridge Wells. When asked to name an old building quite a few children mentioned McDonalds! When asked where they would take a visitor one child replied 'Homebase'! There was some serious work to be done.

The first port of call was the Pantiles. The children spent a very happy morning wandering through the area and observing features of buildings they had never noticed before. Some children had no idea that they lived so close to such a historically rich area.

The class also made good use of the

maroon plaques and wrote down names and dates to research further at school.

The feature the children found most interesting was, quite naturally, the Chalybeate Spring. They loved hearing stories about what the area used to look like and how tourists would have flocked to Tunbridge Wells in its heyday.

After the trip and subsequent internet research at school, Class 3/4 walked from Broadwater Lane to our town's museum to see education officer Katrina Burton. Throughout the morning the children handled artefacts from different periods of the history of Tunbridge Wells and enjoyed a quiz based in the museum itself.

The main learning objective for the whole project was for each child to write and present a talk on a period of history in Tunbridge Wells that they found most interesting. To their teacher's delight, they took on the challenge with relish and produced

Katrina Burton addresses the children in the museum.



some of their best work of the year. They presented their talks to their class teacher, Miss Adams, their Head Teacher, Jane Florey and Katrina from the museum. The whole class were rightfully proud of themselves.

The icing on top of the cake was when Chris Jones accepted the invitation to come and talk to the children and share his knowledge about Tunbridge Wells. He prepared an interesting presentation for the children with beautiful illustrations and photographs. Class 3/4 were extremely receptive to what he had to tell them and were keen to follow up his talk in subsequent history lessons.

All in all, the project was a huge

success. The children's knowledge about their town increased manifold and, again, it was proven that children really do learn best when they are interested and motivated by the subject.

You will be relieved to hear that when children repeated the task they undertook at the beginning of the study the answers were much much more appropriate, so we hope we have created some new history fans for the future! **R.A.**

Young Historians - Class 3/4 Broadwater Primary School



The First Assembly Room at Tunbridge Wells, 1678

John Fuller presents his argument that King Charles the Martyr was originally built as an Assembly Room, not a chapel

Introduction

The first building on the site of the Church of King Charles the Martyr was not originally intended to be a place of worship. That much can be said with some degree of certainty. The builders who began work here in the summer of 1676 were following plans for the construction of an Assembly Room, a sheltered interior space suitable for public and secular activities organised by members of the company assembling every summer at the nearby chalybeate spring. Yet this new social amenity was destined in later years to become part of the church that now stands on the site. This observation departs somewhat from published histories of the place: the article below sets out reasons for a revised understanding of this building's original conception, and its subsequent evolution into a unique proprietary chapel.

The scene to be described reveals a substantial building project, undertaken at significant cost, to erect a formal room for assembly at a site adjacent to the newly-fashionable chalybeate spring, discovered at the side of the road between Tunbridge and Eridge. The spring's attraction grew in part from gossip at the court of Prince

Henry Stuart (1594-1614) though more directly from its supposed virtue of inducing fertility among women, a property said to be like that of the Sauveniére spring at Spa in the Low Countries. This Tunbridge water, said the doctors, can titillate and infuse the thrill of rural dalliance with hygienic legitimacy.

The new building at the spring would be financed by personal subscription, solicited chiefly from visitors, for the place was virtually uninhabited. Work was to begin as soon as funds would allow, and a formal opening for its designed function could be expected perhaps in the season of 1678.

Sources of Evidence

All recorded evidence about the early days at the building-site comes from two vellum manuscripts drawn up in 1696, cataloguing the names of those who subscribed to the building funds, along with the individual amounts they gave; and accounts of payments made or 'disbursed' among various labourers, journeymen, tradespeople, and consultants connected with the work. Though operations began in 1676, or perhaps earlier, and continued for two full decades after, none of the surviving

lists of subscribers' names, nor any statement of builders' accounts, can be dated earlier than 1696, twenty years afterwards. Proof of this long delay is quite conclusive: all the names of subscribers are arranged in alphabetical order, which would be impossible to do before the solicitations had been closed. All sums contributed, and all disbursements made were listed side by side in the same documents after the project's completion in 1696. These original documents are framed and on view in the church.

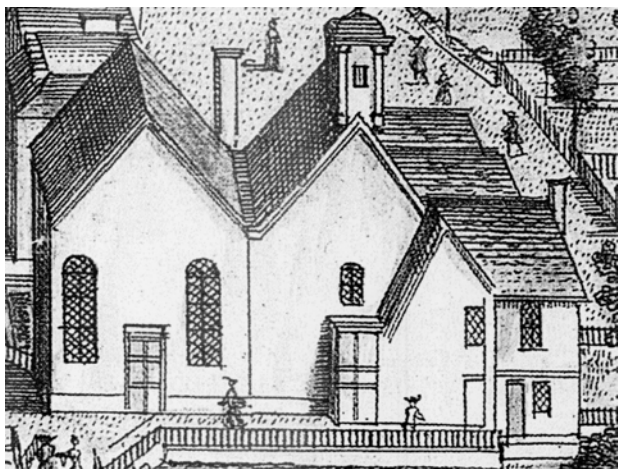
An important restriction to any exact chronological usefulness of the listed disbursements arises from their late appearance, though they do seem to be more or less in a loose order of payment, starting with land clearance and ending with furniture. The whole record of expenditure was entitled, in 1696, 'Disbursements on the Chapel', yet the copyist, peering at the faded bills and their authorisations, could hardly have known whether costs incurred and disbursements made twenty years beforehand were, or were not, 'on the Chapel'. One knows also that the organisation of the company could only be described as

'seasonal', changing uncertainly from year to year according to the presence or absence of significant 'directors' elected on site by the company.

That there was a plan in 1675 or thereabouts to start building is virtually self-evident, though the copyist or accountant compiling the final statement in 1696 might have known nothing of it, for that first plan was superseded at the moment of its completion by a radically new one, lengthening the already-built assembly room and converting or adapting it to function additionally as a chapel. Plain evidence of this change in plan can still be seen in the building's structure, described below.

The First Assembly Room, 1676-1678

There are five main observations to note when reviewing the progress of work at this building-site during the



Engraving by Jan Kip published in 1719. By then the building had been further extended. The left-hand part was added in 1788.

first few years of its history:

1. The structural foundations of the building have no significant compass orientation. If the construction had been intended at its origin to be used as a regularly established church or chapel, it surely would have been oriented toward the east. In fact, as built, its main orientation was more towards the north, actually N. 31 degrees E. as in the diagram opposite.

2. The plasterwork ceiling by John Wetherell in the first building on the site was made wholly symmetrical within its space, decorated in plaster with serenely secular wreaths of leaves and fruits, revealing no hint of ecclesiastical purpose. The ceiling measures forty-three feet long, and twenty-five and a half feet wide, wall-to-wall, set in the full length and breadth of the Assembly Room. One might suggest that the volume of space enclosed was originally intended to be made in the formal contemporary style, approximating a double-cube. The ceiling is twenty-one and a half feet above the present floor-level, so the actual space enclosed exceeded a perfect double-cube by about one fifth.

3. The north end wall of the first building was inexplicably demolished when the enclosed space of the Assembly Room had been already roofed, and was complete as intended. There seems to have been a major change of sentiment, connected

probably with the only date mentioned among the listed 'Disbursements', namely 1678, when '60 Deals with carriage and Workmanship' were brought in 'for the Temporary Use of the Company Anno 1678'. There is just enough evidence here to suggest that the Company, meaning the Subscribers who were actually present at the time, were seated temporarily on specially purchased deal boards in the bare, though completed Assembly Room. There, it seems, they made a decision to enlarge the room for use also as a place in which to hear the Daily Offices or other services. At that time, daily opening of some churches in London could be seen as a feature of polite conduct. Of course, this interpretation of recorded facts might be regarded as speculative, but the outcome certainly was not, as described in the next paragraph.

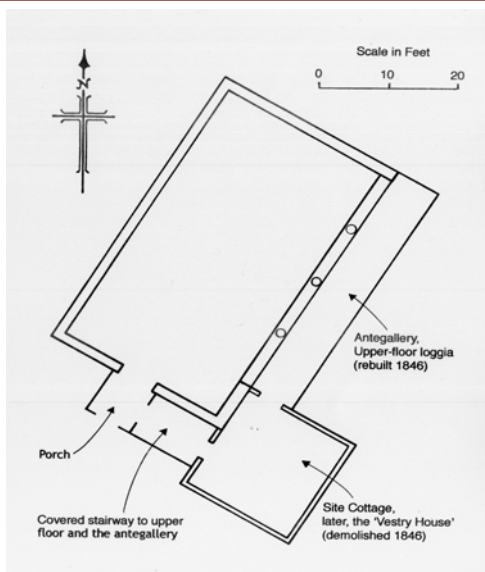
4. Physical evidence that the north wall of the Assembly Room did exist prior to its demolition can be seen in the roof-space of the church. The sawn-off ends of the heavy top-plate laid on the first north wall are still in place, and the extended roof has a different rafter-spacing. This should not be surprising, because a new contractor for the work was named, and the extra costs incurred were entered separately in the disbursements. The measured interior length of added space was fifteen feet

nine inches, plus the width of the demolished wall, making a total interior addition to the length of the building of seventeen feet three inches. John Wetherell, who made the decorated ceiling of the Assembly Room, was asked to provide a suitable pattern for a further ceiling in the extension, a design item for which he was separately paid, though work on it could not be commenced for some time. In the event, an ornate octagon dome in the extended space was made by Henry Doogood, and dated 1682, three or four years after Wetherell's ceiling for the Assembly Room.

5. After the decision to demolish the newly-made north wall, the foundations to the building were lengthened by about seventeen feet, requiring further excavation to a depth of ten feet below the ground surface of the hillside at the northeast corner of the site. Naturally, there were immediate difficulties with drainage, and for safety's sake, railings or 'palisadoes' had to be put in place about the excavation. The labour and expense required to make this extended foundation would have been quite unnecessary had the building been planned and laid out as a chapel from the start.

The Ante-Gallery

Along the interior south-eastern wall of the original building, a structure named in the 1696 list of



disbursements as the 'Antigallery' extended behind a flat-fronted balcony, about nine feet above the floor of the assembly area. This structure, built outwards from the side wall of the building, formed a jettied overhang outside. It was supported from below, somewhat insecurely to judge from its subsequent history. The ante-gallery area was enclosed, except to the front, and floored. The open front overlooking the interior of the assembly room was thirty-eight feet long, occupying the whole length of wall between the 'Vestry House' (see above) and the end wall. The opening was not continued into the extension. Three stout piers or pillars standing on the parapet of the ante-gallery, with pilasters at each end, supported the ceiling and roof above.

The 'Vestry House' was formerly a modest two-storeyed house or cottage on the building site, taken over and used as a site-office during the building works. It was eventually incorporated into the ante-gallery structure. The upper floor and the ante-gallery beyond could be reached through a porch at the doorway into the new assembly building, and up an enclosed stairway that is clearly shown on John Bowra's Plan of Tunbridge Walks, 1738, and more definitively on the 1840 Tithe Map.

A comprehensive demolition carried out in 1846 by William Law Pope, removed the ante-gallery and the old cottage, widening the passageway behind (a public benefit) by about two and a half feet. Only the three pillars on the balcony of the old ante-gallery remained. They continued in place, supporting the roof until about 1881, when this side of the old chapel was rebuilt once again, this time as a chancel and sanctuary for a 'proper' church designed to suit the Church Commissioners' architect. The last appearance of the three ante-gallery pillars and their flanking pilasters seems to have been in a photograph of c.1880, exhibited in the church.

The ante-gallery of the Assembly Room is not an easy thing to describe, though one can say with certainty that if this building had been planned originally as a chapel, an ante-gallery

would be a curiously unexpected thing to find. On the other hand, in a building conceived and built as a secular Assembly Room no-one would be surprised by an upper-floor loggia, from which members of the company could enjoy a splendid view of the people gathered in the room below.

Conclusion

Anyone sceptical that the Parish Church of King Charles the Martyr began life as an Assembly Room devoted to secular pastimes, will possibly look over this short piece and pronounce it entirely a circumstantial fancy. On the other hand, after subtracting all the circumstantial detail, there remains more than enough tangible evidence to say with certainty that the founders of Tunbridge Wells did indeed set out in 1676 to build an Assembly Room, a social amenity in which they could all meet under one roof; and when they had built it they changed their minds by deciding to convert it for use also as their proprietary chapel. And so it remained for more than two hundred years, dubiously dedicated and unconsecrated, until it passed into the hands of the established Church of England. A Chapel-of-Ease this building never was. **J.F.**

Local History Group News

KHF Conference

The Kent History Federation Conference which we hosted at King Charles in May seems to have gone well. There were no major issues. Our thanks to all those who were involved:

- The speakers: Ian Beavis, John Cunningham, and Philip Whitbourn.
- The guides who led the walks: June Bridgeman and the Friends of Woodbury Park Cemetery, Jane Dickson, and Philip Whitbourn,
- The stewards who ensured that everybody was in the right place at the right time: Frances Avery, Jane Dickson and Dennis Penfold (with special thanks to Dennis and Jane who stood outside in the rain and cold for over an hour).
- The registrars who ensured that everybody was properly identified and ticketed: Ann Bates, Charmian Clissold-Jones and Sue Daniels.
- John and Anne Forster who handled arrangements in the Parish Hall.
- Sue Brown and Roger Joye who manned the book stall.
- Lionel Anderson who liaised with the caterers.

We should also thank:

- The Tourist Information Centre who provided three Blue-Badge guides, and a welcome-pack for each delegate.
- The Mayor and Mayoress of Tunbridge Wells.
- Peter Blackwell, Deputy Lord Lieutenant of Kent.
- The Vicar and Parish of King Charles the Martyr.
- Creative Catering of Leigh.
- Geoffrey Ravenhill of St Barnabas' Church.
- Paul McKinnell of Spa Valley Railway.

Next year's conference is to be hosted by the Bromley Local History Society.

Local History Questions

Many thanks to those of you who replied to my question about dolls' hospitals in Tunbridge Wells that might have treated the original Winnie-the-Pooh in the 1920s. You remembered the one at 119 Camden Road - the shop that is now run by the Cats Protection League. It was operational in the 1950s and 1960s, and perhaps a little later, but will have been too late for A.A. Milne. Josephine Butcher, though, in her book *I was born on the Pantiles* mentioned Porter's toy shop on the Pantiles which had shelves of spare dolls' heads, and would fit a new head and wig to her doll after an accident. That will have been about 1920. No indication though whether they ever treated bears.

Another Tennis Champion

In the Winter 2009 Newsletter we printed the story of Herbert Lawford, who grew up in Calverley Park Gardens and was Wimbledon Men's Singles champion in 1887. Susan and James Teuber have advised me of another tennis champion - Charles Edward Welldon, who lived in Blatchington Road in the 1920s.

I have attempted to piece together his story - mainly from the Internet. If you can add to it, or believe there are errors, then please let me know.

The story starts with two clergymen brothers: James and Edward Ind Welldon. James was made Headmaster of Tonbridge School in 1843 and appointed his brother to the staff in 1844. James had three sons, who followed good Victorian professions: James Turner became a solicitor; Charles Edward a tea-planter in Ceylon; while Alfred joined the Navy.

In contrast three of Edward's sons: James Edward, Charles Edward and Frank William, all became clergymen. It is this second Charles Edward whom we must watch. He attended Tonbridge School and went up to Keble College, Oxford, in 1879. In June 1883 he is reported in *The Times* playing in the Oxford-Cambridge doubles tennis match with his partner CW Grinstead. An intriguing aspect is that on the opposing side was Frank William Welldon, who, I think, was his (twin) brother. In May, Charles had also partnered Grinstead at the Oxford

University Lawn Tennis Club championships. This was an open competition then in its fifth year. (In 1879 it had been won by Herbert Lawford (with LR Erskine)).

The OULTC courts were in Norham Road, where Lady Margaret Hall chapel now is, just over half a mile from Keble. There had been some excitement prior to the competition as it was thought that the Renfrew brothers (see the article on Herbert Lawford for the significance of the Renfrews) would play. Unfortunately they did not enter so interest waned, and in the event there were only three pairs. Welldon and his partner got a bye in the semi-final and beat Milford and Russell in the final.

The significance of this is that the OULTC decided against holding any further doubles tournaments, and presented their trophy to the All-England Club, which started its own mens doubles championships in 1884. So, while Welldon cannot really be described as a Wimbledon champion, it is perfectly correct to say that he won the Wimbledon men's doubles trophy in 1883.

Welldon went on to be Vicar of Faringdon, in Berkshire, and Rector of Cotton in Suffolk. He lived in Tunbridge Wells between 1926 and 1934. Just to confuse matters, the other Charles Edward Welldon (the tea planter) was living in Court Road at the same time. **CJ**

Putting Faces to Names: Sue Brown



I was born near Dudley, in 1948, but fortunately we moved to Essex when I was still very small and I avoided acquiring the Black Country accent. After a few years at Witham we moved down to Tunbridge Wells, where we lived in Culverden Down for over thirty years. My father eventually became manager of the Gas Board showrooms at Tonbridge. My mother worked as a book-keeper at Baldwin's travel agency until she was well into her seventies. I now live in a studio flat in Upper Grosvenor Road.

After attending St. John's Primary School I went to what is now the Weald of Kent, after which I decided I would like to work in libraries. My first job at eighteen was as a library assistant at Crowborough Library. After two years I went to Brighton to study Library Science and in 1971 started my first job as a qualified Librarian, running the branch at Rusthall.

I did a variety of jobs over the years, all based in Tunbridge Wells. I set up the Audio/Visual services in the area, served on the main Enquiry Desks and ran the Local Studies collections. By then we had become "Community Librarians", promoting the service outside library buildings. Having spent my career so far trying to avoid children's work I now found myself doing "Baby bounce and rhyme" sessions and storytimes in schools. We

put on a recreation VE Day street party, complete with Spam sandwiches and myself, with guitar, doing Vera Lynn impressions. I could also occasionally be seen parading round the town in 18th Century costume, leading Literary Walks.

In 2007 another restructuring loomed, in which the remaining jobs for professionally qualified staff were to be drastically cut. I read the writing on the wall. It said "Take the money and run". So I did.

Like so many I now wonder "how I found the time to go to work". I joined the Art Society, the Ramblers and the U3A (for which I now lead the Local History group). I am an active member of New Life Church, involved in running Discipleship Group, and helping with our English language school, Healing Rooms ministry and the local churches' debt advice service.

I originally joined RTWCS because I thought it would help me with my local history work (which it did) and have subsequently compiled two of the monographs – "Researching Royal Tunbridge Wells" and "Tunbridge Wells in Literature". I am one of the original members of the Local History Group committee.

Daniel Bech 1950 - 2010

Daniel Bech died suddenly and unexpectedly on the morning of Thursday, 17th. June, aged 59, at his home in York Road, Royal Tunbridge Wells.

Daniel was born in Luxembourg. He was a polyglot, in terms of both languages and intellectual disciplines. Twelve years ago, he and his wife, Katharina Mahler-Bech, chose to settle in Tunbridge Wells. They came to love the town – its style, its setting, its ambience, its history – and were frustrated at the way in which the Town and its Borough Council undervalued, undersold and under-promoted its potential and as a result, did not try to control or direct the development of the Town. Consequently, they both became increasingly active *and vocal* in Town issues and over the last ten years, their views have played a significant part in the discussion of Town issues.

His death will be a very great loss to the Town, the Community and the Borough, particularly at a time when Tunbridge Wells faces probably the greatest challenge in its corporate history, when his meticulously-researched and challenging approach to the current situation and proposed changes would have ensured that glib, superficial justifications of the proposals would not have been tolerated.

One of his strengths was that he was not English and he could therefore see issues from a different point-of-view based on his international and cosmopolitan experience. His approach was both academic and scientific, but he was also a realist and a practical man in devising solutions. He gave freely of his time and knowledge and many organisations in the Town benefited from this. In particular, the origination of the Civic Society website was entirely due to him, as were those of other societies and organizations.

His challenging approach often brought out new thinking and a new approach in others. He served on the Civic Society Executive Committee for two years but was impatient for things to happen faster and as a result, he changed to the new Town Forum where he became a leading protagonist. His concept of the ‘Grot Spot’, an alliterative description which will hopefully be recognised as his devising by the Oxford English Dictionary, is now part of the Tunbridge Wells ‘political’ vocabulary.

That he and Katharina, chose to come and live in Tunbridge Wells is an event for which we should all be grateful and which leaves TunbridgeWells very much in their debt.

The Society would like to extend our deepest sympathy to Katharina for her loss of a remarkable man.

John Cunningham

A Civic Voice Bonus

All individual members of the Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society are entitled to an attractive benefit as a result of the Executive Committee's decision for the Society to join the new Civic Voice organisation in its first year.

You can obtain a free, single admission pass to most National Trust properties. If you have subscribed to RTWCS for "household" membership, you are entitled to two such passes. If you are already a member of the National Trust – which we suspect many of you are – you may still take advantage of this offer because the pass is transferable and can therefore be given to friends or family. We understand that this offer is available during our first year of belonging to Civic Voice, but in fact the pass states that it is valid until 31st December 2011.

If you have internet access, you can download the pass by visiting www.civicvoice.org.uk/nationaltrustcivicvoiceoffer and following a link to the National Trust website. Otherwise, please write to Civic Voice, Unit 101, 82 Wood Street, The Tea Factory, Liverpool, L1 4DQ to request your pass(es), stating your name and that you are a member of Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society, and enclosing the all-important stamped addressed envelope.

Please note that this special pass is subject to a small number of specific restrictions – notably it covers most, but not all, NT properties (most of those in Kent and Sussex are in fact accessible) and it cannot be used on Bank Holiday weekends. Full details are printed on the pass itself. *Roger Joye*

Visit to Faversham

Our visit to Faversham on Saturday 14th August as guests of the Faversham Society, is now being handled by Michael Doyle, who has arranged for us to have a 48-seater coach. The timetable for the day is:

- 10:00 Depart from AXA/PPP opposite the Assembly Hall
- 11:00 Meet at Fleur-de-Lys Centre for a presentation on the history of Faversham and a tour of the museum.
- 12:45 Break for lunch
- 13:45 Guided tour of the town by members of the Faversham Society
- 15:30 Tea and biscuits at the Fleur-de-Lys Centre
- 16:00 Depart Faversham, arriving at Tunbridge Wells c17:00.

The combined cost, covering coach, museum and guided tour is £20. Please send cheques (payable to RTWCS) to Michael Doyle, 18 Dorset Rd. TN2 5AP.

Those wishing to make their own travel arrangements, should meet us at 11:00 at the Fleur-de-Lys Centre, and pay the Faversham Society directly for the museum and tour. However it would be helpful if they could advise Michael (tel: 531374, email mdoylehva@btinternet.com) that they are intending to come.

Royal Tunbridge Wells
CIVIC SOCIETY
Forthcoming Events

Meetings start at 7.45. The location can vary, so please check the details below.

Please remember to bring your membership card. Visitors are welcome, but from September 9th there will a £2 charge for non-members.

July 24th (Sat)	Annual Garden Party (6 - 8pm) In the gardens of the Schools at Somerhill, by kind invitation of the Governors of the Schools. Please see details below.
Aug 14th (Sat)	Guided Tour of Faversham See page 23 for details.
Sep 9-14th	Heritage Open Days See pages 10 and 11, or check: www.tunbridgewellsheritageopendays.org
Sep 9th	A presentation by senior TWBC representatives , followed by your opportunity to question them. Royal Wells Hotel, Mount Ephraim

The **Annual Garden Party** is open to Civic Society members and their guests. Admission is by ticket, priced £8.50, available from Frances Avery, 16 Great Courtlands, Langton Green, Tunbridge Wells TN3 0AH. Please enclose cheque, payable to Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society, and a stamped addressed envelope.

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.

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www.thecivicsociety.org