

# Spring 2016



Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society

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## Summer Events

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### Annual Garden Party

**Hungershall Lodge**  
**Saturday, July 9th, 6-8pm**

By kind permission of the owners, Ian and Sheila Marshall. Open to members of the Civic Society and their guests. Tickets, which must be bought in advance, are £12.50 each, and are available from Trina Lewis, address below. Please make cheques payable to RTWCS, and enclose a sae. Hungershall Lodge is the first house in Hungershall Park. There is adequate parking nearby. Directions will be provided. Please see page 16 for details of the house.



Trina Lewis, Claremont Lodge, 49 Claremont Road, TN1 1SY

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### Visit to the Romney Marsh Churches

**Thursday, August 4th**

Last year John Hendy gave us a talk on the Churches of Romney Marsh and offered to give us a personal tour around them this summer. So please come along for a lovely day out visiting four historic churches with a ploughman's lunch at the Rose and Crown in Old Romney. The cost is £25 per person, to include £15 for the coach and £10 contribution to the Romney Marsh Historic Churches Trust. John Hendy gives his time for free. Coffee/Tea on arrival and Lunch is at your own cost. To minimise the time spent on ordering and preparation, lunch will be a pre-booked ploughman's. We leave from the Town Hall at 9am and return by 5.30pm. Please send your cheques (RTWCS) or cash, to John de Lucy at 28 Warwick Park, TN2 5TB. 01892-540560.

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Front cover: a Trojan delivery van of the type bought by the Tunbridge Wells Corporation in 1925. See page 4.

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## Personally Speaking

by Chris Jones

**Apologies ...** I'm afraid that this edition of the Newsletter will be a little late in getting to you. I usually like to get the Spring edition to the printer well before the end of March, but this year I have been on holiday. And while I was on holiday I decided to change some of the content. When walking around a strange city it's always interesting to see how they celebrate their history. In Perth, Western Australia, they marked their 150th anniversary by placing 150\* plaques in the pavement of the main street. The example shown here may be a little difficult to read, but records the contribution to the city of two young men from Tunbridge Wells: Alfred and George Stone. I thought that if Perth could go to the trouble of digging up its pavement to remember them, then I should tell their story in the Newsletter. Please see page 12.



\* There were originally 150, but one celebrated Rolf Harris, who was born in Perth. His plaque was removed in 2014.

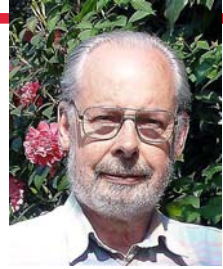
**Delay ...** Our own efforts at commemoration are also a little delayed. Completion of the latest tranche of commemorative plaques is held up while we identify owners and get permission. It was heartening, therefore, to receive an email from the TE Lawrence Society expressing interest in our plans to commemorate Charles Doughty of Beulah Road. Lawrence it seems was a fan of Doughty's book 'Travels in Arabia Deserta'. I hope we can progress with the plaques soon.

**The Trojan Delivery Van ...** There is no real reason for including that picture of the Trojan van on the front cover, other than that I rather like it. Charmian found the brochure in the Town Hall archives - the Corporation bought one of them in 1925. As with most brochures from the period, the claims of the advertisers seem far-fetched. The Trojan, they said, was the 'tradesman's transport of the future'. Running expenses were 'revolutionised by the use of solid-tyres and Wonder-Springs', and there were apparently only seven moving parts. (It had a four-cylinder two-stroke engine, with chain drive to the rear axle, and no differential.) I can't decide whether the most dubious claim was that 'You can trust your errand boy with a TROJAN - no skill is required for driving', or that 'The TROJAN cleans itself and always looks spick and span'.

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# From the Planning Scrutineers

by Alastair Tod



The rebuilding of the eastern end of **Royal Victoria Place** was approved in March; this will see the disappearance of Ely Place and the food court, and other major changes. The Society supported these except for the loss of buildings on the corner of the Precinct and Camden Road, the most prominent being the one now occupied by White Stuff. After many alterations this is in poor condition but we felt it contributed to the character of the town centre and Camden Road. We had several meetings with the architect who insisted that retaining the buildings, or their facades, was not possible. In the end reluctantly we accepted his proposal for an alternative which includes a rooftop restaurant.

As reported last time the **Dairy Crest** site also got consent, in this case for 58 small flats, against strong opposition by the Society and local residents. We felt this was against Council policy, much too large for the site and out of keeping with the area, and meant destroying the historic gable of the St Johns Mission Hall. It seems the Council was persuaded by the contribution the flats would make to the housing targets. Now, however, the site has been sold on to McCarthy and Stone who propose some changes and a care home which will not count towards housing numbers. The new plans will require planning consent, but it is hard to see how this can be resisted. Meanwhile the owners have applied to demolish the Mission Hall.

We are concerned about the implications of housing numbers being treated as paramount, which might also affect the **Union House** case, reported on elsewhere in this issue. Janet Sturgis wrote to the Times of Tunbridge Wells about the conflict with the Council's declared policies, and the danger this represents to the environment and heritage of the town. The paper treated this as a front-page story and the Cabinet member for Planning replied that the Council was reviewing the **Local Plan**. Since this review will take at least two years we remain concerned about the position in the meanwhile.

We also noted with concern the intention of Wealden Council to allow 49 houses on land against the borough boundary in **Benhall Mill Road**. The boundary is anomalous here and the land is logically part of the town, while the future residents seem bound to depend on Tunbridge Wells for their services; the borough Council however has no say in the development, and we have urged that the boundary should be reviewed when possible. **AT**

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## Chairman's Letter

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Tunbridge Wells  
March 2016

*I feel metaphorically breathless after a first quarter-year in the chair. While I knew that a lot of projects were taking shape in Tunbridge Wells, I wasn't expecting such a high level of demand for the Society to be consulted. Still less did I anticipate the associated attention I would receive in the town's two papers. However, I have adopted a policy of always responding to press inquiries despite the risks that involves. I believe that the occasional misinterpretation of what I said is outweighed by the Society's having a voice in the local press. However, I admit to some consternation when I was accused of dying my hair for a Courier photo!*

*Despite all the pressures, I do feel confident about leading the Society. The reason for this is my growing appreciation of the strength of the support provided by the team of individuals who manage the many aspects of this complex organisation.*

*The considerable administration involved in running the Society was managed by **David Sandford** who took on the responsibility for membership and communications after Christo Skelton's departure (in addition to his role maintaining the website and providing technical support for our speakers at Members' Meetings). He, along with **Nigel Price**, our ever-efficient Treasurer who sorted out the financial arrangements, kept things going until **Catriona Lewis** our new Membership Secretary could take over. And **Lorna Blackmore** has managed to fit in to her busy schedule the role of welcoming members at the top of the Town Hall stairs. We have decided that attempting to "check the register" as Christo did is too time consuming for those of us who lack his comprehensive knowledge of members' names.*

*The details of the planning system are a foreign country to me, but with **Alastair Tod** reporting on planning applications, **Michael Doyle** attending Planning Committees and **Brian Lippard** managing to go through the (to me deadly) documents and meetings about Site Allocations Plans, I can – just – keep up to speed. **Peter Lewis**, as a new Executive member has the professional background to add to our strength in considering planning issues.*

*The very high standard of this quarterly newsletter is entirely down to the dedication, scholarship and technical skills of **Chris Jones**. He manages to*

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*recruit an endless succession of contributors to reveal new insights into aspects of Tunbridge Wells never previously suspected.*

*The Local History Group under the energetic leadership of **John Cunningham** produces a steady stream of publications which focus on a particular subject of the town's history. In the case of the outstanding historical atlas of the town, it has become a useful tool for residents researching the history of their houses. (Have you bought your copy of 'Eminence Grise' on the 1st Marquess of Abergavenny? Check the website for the full set and how to purchase).*

*The annual RTWCS Awards for improvements to our town's built environment involve **David Wright** and his committee visiting various sites throughout the year, and then presenting the valued awards at our October meeting in the Town Hall.*

***John de Lucy** continues to find marvellous venues for our annual Garden Party (see details for this year's 9 July event in this issue) as well as summer outings for members (watch for Churches of Romney Marsh): an invaluable 'perk' of membership of the Society.*

*Despite his busy professional schedule, **David Bartholomew** provides his valuable insight and acts as our official photographer.*

*Even standing down from the Executive doesn't end some people's commitment. Two former members of the Executive continue to contribute significantly to the Society. **Roger Joye** manages to discover always interesting speakers for our monthly Members' Meetings, and **Richard Still** copes nobly with the administration of the Gift Aid system that makes a valuable contribution to our funds.*

*While the Executive Committee is therefore a major support for me, this is not to say that we all agree about everything. Our meetings involve robust discussion and considering issues from all angles. Since much of what we discuss involves matters of taste, this is to be expected. However, our debates take place within a shared understanding that our goal is to achieve the best outcome for Tunbridge Wells.*

*Janet Sturgis*

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# The Town Hall Again

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## Alastair Tod explores the Council's plans for a new civic centre and theatre.

It's like buses. After a long period with little seeming to change in Royal Tunbridge Wells several major schemes have arrived together. Although not the largest, the Council's proposal to replace the Town Hall and Assembly Hall is the most significant step for generations, and the Society has been fully involved in discussions about it.

A few years ago we opposed the then Council's plan to sell off the Town Hall for retail use and to move some or all of their operations to Hawkenbury, or even Paddock Wood. We objected to this partly because the plan was developed in secrecy, and indeed with subterfuge. We wanted to see the present civic buildings preserved, but we also thought all Council activities should be housed together, on a central site for ease of public access. We were never persuaded that some Council business could be called 'back-office' and housed anywhere, or that facilities for elected

members could be detached from offices for the staff.

In a slightly changed context these principles remain. The Council's space needs have shrunk, partly because some functions are now shared with other authorities. With severe cuts in Council funding a plan now needs to allow for the possibility of further changes, while retaining the essence of local democracy and enhancing public access. As is now well known (see Winter 2015 Newsletter) the Council plans a new civic centre in Mt Pleasant Avenue, with offices on the car park behind the AXA offices in Crescent Road; and meeting rooms and Council Chamber by the entrance to Calverley Grounds. More than half the offices would be available for letting to a commercial user.

The scheme would include a new theatre. It would be larger than the Assembly Hall – probably about 1200 seats – with proper backstage facilities,



The present entrance to Calverley Grounds would form the entrance to the new civic buildings (on the left) and to the theatre (on the right).



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loading space, storage and workshops. The Assembly Hall has been recently improved but the site is severely restricted, with access and backstage limitations which prevent it hosting the larger touring shows. The Council has promised that there will be no interruption in availability of a performance space, which requires any new theatre to be on a different site. A consultant is now studying size, costs and specification, and if possible the new theatre would be on the site of the Great Hall car park, with car parking reinstated below it. This would facilitate a new civic space at the entrance to the Grounds, with the new buildings overlooking the park.

The Society has given cautious approval to these plans, which appear to meet the principles we outlined previously. The two elements are connected, with the whole plan depending on the sale of the present civic buildings. As a Society we are naturally concerned with how these are to be used, and how their character will be respected. The listed parts include the exterior, the foyers and main staircases of the Town Hall and Assembly Hall, and the Council Chamber. We understand that potential users include universities which are interested in establishing postgraduate faculties in Tunbridge Wells, and these would appear highly suitable as offering high-value institutional use, but an alternative possibility is that the buildings will be adapted as housing.

The case for the development is based on the fact that it would cost about the same (£10.5m) to bring the Town Hall

fully up to standard for modern working, access and environmental conditions as to build a new civic centre with more scope and income potential from letting part of the offices. The Assembly Hall could be enlarged and upgraded at a cost of about £12.5m, but some limitations would remain, while the cost of a replacement theatre elsewhere is estimated at £25m. The Council supports the running of the Assembly Hall, and it is understood that a new theatre, while offering a wider repertoire and helping to draw visitors to Tunbridge Wells, would also need operating support.

Other concerns for us include naturally the design of the new buildings and their effect on Calverley Grounds; it is encouraging that the architects retained for both buildings are Allies and Morrison, a respected firm of modernists. We want to see the designs for the theatre and the civic centre integrated, with the facilities available and suitable for use by local groups at realistic cost, so that the complex becomes a centre of community activity in a way the present buildings are not. We understand that if agreed the development would take place over a number of years, during which time the Council will depend on commercial partners. Once the process has started, probably with the sale of the existing civic buildings, it seems the Council will be committed to a long haul with little opportunity to change course.

We will continue to watch developments and report to members when we can. **AT**

## Another case for the Society ...

### **Alastair explains that our concerns about the Union House redevelopment relate not just to its appearance, but that it would block any future link between the Pantiles and the West Station.**

Another case for the Society ...

... is Union House at the end of the Pantiles, which was bought for redevelopment last year. The Society was deeply involved in the battles more than fifty years ago which resulted in the present Union House, which could have been worse but is generally felt unworthy of its position. As a commercial development it has had a chequered history, and with the shop tenants struggling has had a blighting effect on the southern end of the Pantiles.

The purchaser was Dandara, the housebuilder developing Knights Wood. We had had contact with them about this, and welcomed the opportunity to discuss their plans for Union House. These appeared in the press in October, and seem to have been greeted with general alarm. Dandara proposed three linked blocks of flats, mainly in white brick, between five and eight storeys over the existing two levels of car parking, with a 'pump room' and cafe as a community facility. There seemed to be no correspondence with the character of the Pantiles, and while as a Society we didn't feel it was the place for pastiche, we thought that the style and materials of the new should harmonise with the character of the old.

The developer needs to build about 128 flats, a very intensive use of the site. The proposed blocks are to sit exactly on the footprint of the existing Union House,

making the scale oppressively large in relation to the Pantiles. There would be no change to Linden Park Road which separates Union House from the Pantiles. The land at the rear, which is now a car park owned by Dandara, is technically part of the Common. As such it is protected from building, but could be used to relieve the pressure to develop so intensively if substitute common land were found and the designation altered. However, having bought the site, Dandara are resistant to being delayed by legal or ownership processes.

Moreover it emerged that four fifths of the development would be inaccessible to the public, a gated enclave with a 'concierge' block dividing a rear courtyard from the public area adjoining Linden Park Road. A major problem with the present Union House is that there is no way through to the West Station area, or indeed to anywhere except the narrow pavement of Eridge Road. Dandara's design threatens to make this worse. The Council appeared to recognise the problem in the original version of its current Plan, which defined an Area of Change covering Union House, the car park land, and the adjoining Montacute Gardens houses with their large gardens and communal green; the policy required the area to be subject to a master-plan, with mixed uses and pedestrian links to the Common and to the West Station.

The Council's idea seemed only

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reasonable since another developer had reached agreement with most of the owners of the Montacute Gardens land to participate in a comprehensive project which would preserve most or all of the villas while developing the surrounding land and creating links through. This developer had sketched an outline plan with proposals for the Montacute Gardens land related to the Dandara land and held discussions with the Council for some time. However at a very late stage in formulating its current Plan the Council abandoned the Area of Change with its requirement for a master-plan, substituting only a proviso that the two sites, Union House and Montacute Gardens, should be planned with reference to each other.

A glance at the map shows the importance of co-ordination to achieving the necessary connections. A possible objection is that there are physical obstacles to creating these links, in the shape of the very busy A26 Eridge Road and the changes of level across the site.

Our argument on behalf of the Society is that improved access to and from the Pantiles is essential, and is likely to become more so, and it is really only likely through a comprehensive plan, even if this is carried out by different agents over time. For example, almost any development of the low-lying car park land is likely to raise the level, probably by extending the decks of parking under Union House.

Our discussions with Dandara, along no doubt with the representations of others, have resulted in a considerable improvement in the architectural treatment, which does now echo rather successfully some characteristics of the Pantiles in a modern idiom. However it seems no concessions have been made on our other objections, to the scale of the blocks, the creation of a gated enclave in this location, and the lack of links or relation to the adjoining land. A planning application is expected next month and if necessary we will object on these grounds. **AT**

Dandara have made some changes since this early design, though the single-storey block in the centre remains. The subterranean passage in the present Union House is far from attractive, but at least it allows access. The proposed scheme would block all entry to the public.



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## The Stones of Perth

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**For nearly two centuries the Stone family was a significant presence in Tunbridge Wells. John Stone, father and son, guided the Improvement Commissioners in the 1830s and '40s; Frank Stone worked to safeguard the Common in the 1880s; while the Buss Stone archives provide much of what we know about the development of Calverley. This article shows that members of the family were also prominent in the foundation and growth of Perth in Western Australia.**

There have been people living in western Australia for many thousands of years, but it came late to the attention of Europeans. It was the Dutch who first explored this coastline, early in the 17th century; crossing the Indian Ocean from South Africa en-route for Batavia (Jakarta), headquarters of the Dutch East-India Company. They called it New Holland. The French, too, were interested; but it was the British who brought it firmly within the western sphere, with the establishment of the Swan River Colony in 1829. The Governor-to-be, James Stirling, set out from England early that year to establish a base. In June a young lawyer from Tunbridge Wells followed him. Alfred H Stone was hoping to take

advantage of generous land grants to establish a farm there.

There have been comments in the press recently about this arrival of Europeans in the late 18th/ early 19th centuries. The University of New South Wales has advised its students that 'invasion' might be a more appropriate term than 'settlement'. It was something to think about in the writing of this article. The choice was made to present it using the traditional 'settlement narrative', as the objective was simply to explain the activities of the Stone family within that particular colonial society. It is well to remember, though, that a different, rather darker, story might well have been told instead.

The Stone family was originally from Mayfield. John Stone, a solicitor, came to Tunbridge Wells in 1797 and married Jemima Baldock from Goudhurst. They set up home on Mount Ephraim, and had six sons. Four of them went into the law; two of these, John and William, were active in Tunbridge Wells; two were to go considerably further afield.

When Stirling reached Australia in 1829, he decided that the mouth of the Swan River was a little too exposed, so established his main settlement at Perth, 12 miles inland. He was starting completely from scratch - there were no



John and Jemima Stone.  
Alfred H Stone  
(aged 22)

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Alpha Cottage: Alfred's home on St George's Terrace, opposite Government House. Fanny (standing) and Maria.



buildings, and no roads or bridges. Some of the incomers brought pre-fabricated buildings, but otherwise they lived in tents while building their homes. Neither was there any administrative or commercial infrastructure.

Most of the initial settlers were intending to farm. Some of the passengers on Stone's ship took breeding stock with them, though these suffered terribly during the four-month journey. Stone had paid some £70 for his passage, and £25 each for two male servants. These were intended to work his farm - settlers were allowed an additional 200 acres for each worker they brought. Stone was keen to start as soon as possible. Before getting his official allocation of land he experimented with radishes and cabbages, and tropical fruit he had acquired en-route in Rio de Janiero. He wrote back to his parents: 'We are at last landed from the tumbling ocean, in the most romantic country in the world ... The climate is delightfully mild and serene so that you may live entirely out of doors without danger of colds or rheumatism.' The letter was published in the *Brighton Gazette* and no doubt encouraged others to make the same journey.

In the event, he never did establish a farm. It became apparent that what the

new colony needed as much as farmers, were lawyers and administrators (and traders and builders and teachers and priests; and, in those gendered times, women, perhaps especially women). When one of his two farm workers died, Stone gave up his land grant and took up various legal positions: as JP and Clerk to the Magistrates Court in 1830, later the first Crown Solicitor. One of his record books is on display in the Old Court House Museum in Perth. He built a cottage opposite Government House, on what is now St George's Terrace - the very heart of the central business district. It was called Alpha Cottage, possibly because it was the first, though there was also a house of that name in Tunbridge Wells, in Grosvenor Road. It was a single-storey building with low-pitched roof and verandahs. The main block had parlour, dining room, and office, with two bedrooms attached, and a separate kitchen block linked by a covered way. The gardens were extensive and dedicated mainly to vines - the Stones

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made both wine and jam from the grapes. In 1835 Alfred married Maria Helms, from a successful trading family. They had three children: William, Fanny and Jemima. There is a plan of the cottage showing, rather charmingly, where each child sat around the dining table.

In 1831 Alfred was joined by George Frederick Stone, his youngest brother. Aged only eighteen, he must have competed his legal training under Alfred. At times they were partners in private practice; at times they competed for public position. George was Registrar of B.M.D. and organised the first census in 1848; and in 1859 was appointed Advocate (later Attorney) General.

Back in England two of their brothers were contributing to the smooth running of the legal process there. John (jnr) produced a handbook for JPs in 1836, and a guide to the new Metropolitan Police in 1839. William published a guide to the operation of building societies in 1851.

One of Alfred's main contributions to the history of Perth is a collection of photographs taken by him between 1860 and 1873, being some of the earliest shots of the young town (and currently held by

the State Library of WA). They include pictures of the new Government House and Town Hall under construction by convict labour. The initial policy had been not to send convicts to the Swan River, and there was some opposition in 1850 when that policy was changed. Between then and 1868 some 9,300 convicts arrived. They provided much of the labour for public buildings and roads – once they had built their own accommodation: the rather forbidding Fremantle Prison. (Many of the non-convict settlers were not exactly free: farm servants such as those brought by Alfred would have signed indentures committing themselves to a period of labour, perhaps five years, in return for their passage.)

For forty years the Stones were central to the social and administrative life of the growing colony. In 1868 Alfred's daughter Fanny married George Hampton, the Governor's son. The governor and his son were not popular. It is said not to have been a love-match but arranged to enhance George's respectability. The couple moved to England, and settled with their three children in Torquay. Their son was born in Tunbridge Wells in 1870, perhaps



Left: George Frederick Stone. Right: Rose Hill, George and Charlotte's home on Adelaide Terrace. It is tempting to link the name to Rosehill in Tunbridge Wells - the Rosehill estate, between London and Clarence Roads, was owned by the Stone family.



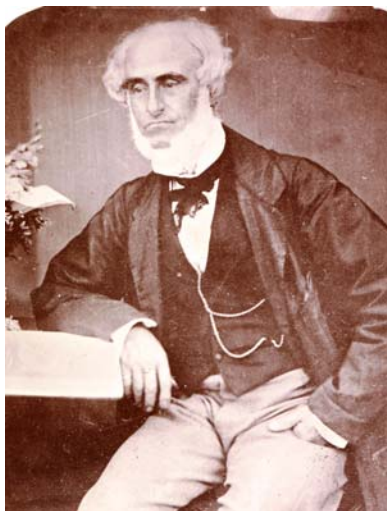
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while they were visiting relatives. George died in 1872 and Fanny remarried two years later - to her cousin Frederick Alfred Stone, of Tunbridge Wells. Family tradition has it that she had loved him all along, though it is not clear how they might have met prior to her first marriage. Frederick had also been intended for the law, but went for a soldier instead. They lived at no.1 Clarence Road.

Meanwhile, back in Perth, a candidate in the 1886 election was making comments about the 'Six Hungry Families' who dominated the economic and social life of the Colony. The Stones were one of those families. It was still a small community: the population of Perth was still only about 8,000. Everything changed in 1892 with the discovery of gold. The goldfields were many miles away, around Kalgoorlie, but Perth and Fremantle were the essential links to the outside world and prospered mightily. Both cities have a wealth of late-19th century architecture: public buildings, theatres and hotels. Another Stone rose to prominence at this time. George's son, Edward, followed his father into the law, and became a judge. In 1901 he was appointed Chief Justice of Western Australia, and knighted. On retirement he was made Lieutenant-Governor.

Western Australia still benefits from its natural resources, and there are still Stones active in the law. The Stone legal firm, having merged with firms in Sydney and Melbourne, recently announced a tie-up with a major Chinese firm.

We might note one final Stone



Alfred Stone in 1861

connection. Maria's sister, Mary Helms, married the colonial chaplain, John Wittenboom. Their grand-daughter, Edith Cowan (Alfred and Maria Stone's great niece) was the first female MP in Australia. There is a university in Perth named after her. Her's is the face on the \$50 note. **CJ**



*Note: Alfred's pictures, and his diaries for the years 1850-52, form the backbone of a fascinating book: 'Court & Camera: the life and times of A.H. Stone', published in 2012 by Jacqueline O'Brien and Pamela Statham-Drew. My thanks to Pamela and to Tim Croft, Alfred's great, great grandson, for their help with this article and permission to use the pictures.*

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## Hungershall Lodge

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**Our Garden Party this year is to be held at Hungershall Lodge (no. 1 Hungershall Park), the home of Ian and Sheila Marshall. In the notes below, Ian explains a little of the history of the house.**

Hungershall Lodge stands on the site of the old farmhouse of Hungershall Farm which, until the 1830s, had operated for very many years in the triangle of land between the Common, Cabbage Stalk Lane (so called because in winter the old stalks of the cabbages were thrown onto the steep parts of the lane to stop the horses slipping in icy conditions on what was the main route from the town to Groombridge), and what is now Hungershall Park, though 11 acres of land now known as Park View House on the other side of the road to Hungershall Park was also part of the farm. The land was owned by the Abergavenny family and remained so until 1912 when death duties forced its sale and the land parcels became freehold. The house was built around 1840 and pre-dated the construction of Hungershall Park which

took place around 1855 when the first stage of the development started with the building of five large houses. A second development saw five more large houses built ten years later.

Hungershall Lodge was originally accessed off Cabbage Stalk Lane in the middle of the Common and was rather smaller than it is now. In 1872 the then owner decided to enlarge the house by increasing the size of the North Wing which then housed the domestic quarters. To overcome any objection from next door (2 Hungershall Park) he simply purchased that house! The house remained largely unchanged until 1965 when new owners brought it into the 20th century. Although some of the original features were lost, eg the old kitchen range, and an ornate painted “thunder box”, I have acquired the original plans



Hungershall Lodge:  
The Entrance



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Hungershall Lodge:  
The Garden



for renovation drawn up by local architects, and it is pleasing to see Lord Evans' handwritten annotations saying 'Leave' beside many of their proposals, eg to take away the back stairs and all the servants bells, which we are therefore able to enjoy to this day.

The occupants over the years have been an interesting bunch. The 1861 Census reveals that Eliza Williams, widow of General Williams, lived at the house with her Butler, Lady's Maid and three servant girls, to say nothing of the workmen tending the ten acres of grounds. In 1881 a Miss Worthington occupied the house and then an American, Daniel Howard, moved in, dying there in 1905. The house was auctioned on 23rd April 1906 at Tokenhouse Yard in the City and was bought by a Mr Elsley who owned a foundry close to Oxford Circus and whose business cast Eros in Picadilly Circus. The

family owned the house until 1946 although it had been shut up during World War II. It was then bought by Rupert Gunnis, an erudite, well-connected and wealthy man whose mother was a Streatfeild from Chiddingstone. Gunnis devoted the latter part of his life to writing a definitive work, *A Dictionary of British Sculptors 1660-1851*, which is still the leading work on the subject. The house was filled with an enormous collection of art and antiques such that, on his death in 1965, the Victoria & Albert Museum commissioned a photographer to visit the house and photograph the contents for posterity. The whereabouts of over 90% of its contents are known today, such was their importance. The house was purchased by Lord Evans in 1966 and he carried out a substantial but sensitive renovation. He died in 1984 and the current occupants acquired it shortly afterwards. **IM**

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## Dr Thomson's Diary

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**Dr Thomas Thomson lived at Belvedere, on what we currently call the cinema site. In this article David Bushell describes his life before and after coming to the town. His original title was: *'Dr Thomas Thomson of Belvedere, Tunbridge Wells (1776 – 1853): an outline of his life, including extracts from his commonplace notebook'***

Thomas Thomson had a successful career as a military physician. He served against Napoleon in the West Indies and the Peninsula, and against the United States at the battle of New Orleans. After this he came to Tunbridge Wells, where he lived in Belvedere House, today the site of the former cinema, and practiced his profession here for many years.

He was born in Kent in 1776, but little is known of his early life and parentage. At 21 he was an Assistant Surgeon at Chatham Barracks, and in 1800 became Surgeon to the 25<sup>th</sup> Foot (the Sussex Regiment). His uncle (and future father-in-law), Frederick Thomson, was a naval surgeon, but Thomas did not obtain formal medical qualifications until 1816 - a doctorate from the University of Paris.

In 1810 while serving in the West Indies he was made Deputy Inspector of (military) Hospitals. He was promoted to Brevet (acting) Inspector of Hospitals in 1825, though by this time he had been retired on half pay for some years. With his final promotion to Inspector of Hospitals in 1830 came full retirement from army service.

Thomson kept a commonplace book and diary, now lodged with the Wellcome Library. While entries are intermittent and mostly record scientific observations, they do provide a small window into his thoughts and activities.

### **1801: Mediterranean and Egypt**

In May 1801 Thomson sailed for Egypt. He was at Alexandria days after its fall to the British in September. The French had occupied the area since 1798. Various French archaeological discoveries in Egypt were appropriated by the British at this time: the Rosetta Stone for example, which to this day is displayed in the British Museum.

### **1813: In the Peninsula**

He arrived on the north Spanish coast in 1813 very soon after the British and Portuguese capture of San Sebastian. He remained in the area during further battles: Nivelles in November, Nive in December, and Orthez in February 1814. His commonplace book records his impressions of St Andero:

*Oct 1<sup>st</sup>: employed in viewing the hospitals at St Andero containing about 1400 sick and wounded who are accommodated in churches and convents in a very comfortable manner considering all the difficulties a medical officer has to contend with and the apathy of the natives.*

He complained of the filth and dirt of St Andero, not helped by the fondness of the locals for smoking:

*I never was more disgusted with any place than it, most particularly the foundling hospital there which beggars all description.*

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Battle of Nivelle 1813. Thomson was awarded the Peninsula Medal with clasps for actions in Egypt, Martinique, Guadeloupe, Nivelle, Nive and Orthez.



### 1814: West Indies / America

In Sept 1814 he sailed for the West Indies, calling at Madeira, Barbados, Guadeloupe and Jamaica; and then, between 23 December and 18 January, was involved in the Battle of New Orleans against the Americans in the ‘War of 1812’ (see Summer 2015 Newsletter). The British attack was defeated and the army withdrew, but Thomson had the satisfaction of a complimentary report by General Keane: *Thomson claims my best acknowledgements for the care and attention shown to the wounded - the whole of whom collected, draped and comfortably lodged before two in the morning.*

### Post War life in London

After the war Thomson practised as a physician in London. He lived in Conduit St in the West End. In 1817 he married his cousin, Louisa Thomson. Their only child – Arthur Dyott Thomson – was baptised in 1821 at St George’s, Hanover Square. Arthur was not a robust child yet graduated from Oxford and was called to The Bar though he did not practice. He wrote a number of religious books. He and his wife, Elizabeth, lived at 12 Pembridge Villas in Kensington.

Thomson’s commonplace book records the death – in January 1820 – of his

mother: *a few minutes before Midnight my respected mother expired after a fortnight’s confinement to bed – advising which she suffered little pain – her resignation was most perfect – “sic mihi contingat mori”.*

### Belvedere, Tunbridge Wells

Belvedere stood on the former cinema site in Church Road, Tunbridge Wells, opposite Holy Trinity Church. The extensive grounds included today’s Lonsdale and Clanricarde Gardens.

It is not clear exactly when Thomas Thomson acquired Belvedere but it must have been by 1824 as papers of John Ward (builder of the new Calverly estate) note that Thomson refused to sell Belvedere to Ward. Thomson was also a member of the 1824 committee setting up the new parish of Holy Trinity, donating £50 to the building fund. Also in 1824, he bought one and a half acres on the north side of Jordan’s Lane (now Church Road), eventually being the site of Trinity Church and the Priory Houses\*.

Interestingly, maps at that time describe

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Belvedere as “Dr Thomson’s house” and only start to refer to it as Belvedere from 1851. The estate was originally known as Little Mount Pleasant.

### **Later travels in England and Europe**

Thomson recorded travels in England and Europe in the proceeding decades:

1831 – *left Tunbridge Wells on 9<sup>th</sup> May; left London on 14<sup>th</sup> July on a tour to the Isle of Wight; arrived Brighton on 5<sup>th</sup> August and placed Arthur at Mr Allpie’s school; 24<sup>th</sup> September left Brighton and took possession of 34 Halfmoon Street (Mayfair) on 29<sup>th</sup>.*

1832 – *left Tunbridge Wells June 19<sup>th</sup> for Oxford; 23<sup>rd</sup>, left Kensington and arrived at Oxford without the sympathy of religious or political connexion a residence is most irksome after a certain time.* Thomson then travelled to Leamington, Warwick Castle and Kenilworth. *25 July – left Malvern and arrived at Cheltenham; 28<sup>th</sup> at Oxford; 29<sup>th</sup> London; August 2<sup>nd</sup> Tunbridge Wells; 3<sup>rd</sup> placed Arthur at Mr Allpie’s; 9<sup>th</sup> took possession of No 1 Priory (Tunbridge Wells).*

1834 – Thomson holidayed in Italy, recording visits to Genoa, Pisa, Lucia, Tuscany, Siena and Rome.

He then set down this advice for men/husbands: *Keep on good terms with wife, stomach and conscience.*

### **Ticehurst Lunatic Asylum**

Apart from practising as a family doctor, Thomson served for ten years as the Visiting Physician to the Ticehurst Private (Lunatic) Asylum, following the resignation of Thomas Mayo in 1836.

Ticehurst was an institution for the wealthy (today’s Priory Hospital is situated on part of the old Asylum’s grounds). His appointment was not without rival. The visiting justices had to decide between Thomson and the much younger Dr John Bramston Wilmot. The justices concluded that *though an old man might not be wiser than a young one, an old physician might have the most experience* so Dr Thomson was elected. When he himself resigned ten years later, Dr Wilmot was elected in his place.

### **Illness and death**

On 26 April 1844 Thomson records the death of his wife: *lost my beloved Louisa who was interred on 3<sup>rd</sup> May. 5<sup>th</sup> May left home for Bath and returned on the 10<sup>th</sup> accompanied by Arthur from Piccadilly.* Louisa was buried across the road from her Tunbridge Wells home, in Holy Trinity churchyard.

As for Thomas, the following year he became seriously ill, as he recorded: *29<sup>th</sup> October - a serious and sudden attack of illness which confined me for some weeks but now which by the blessing of God I have recovered and I believe with improved constitution.*

The commonplace book then falls silent until recording what was probably his final illness: *16<sup>th</sup> August 1852 - was attacked in this morning with a similar affliction to that of October 29<sup>th</sup> 1845, nearly seven years since.*

Thomson died of heart disease on 4 August 1853, with a funeral service and burial at Holy Trinity. Arthur inherited all his father’s personal effects and assets

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The Thomson memorial in Trinity - to Louisa, Thomas and Elizabeth. The Thomson arms at the top, are duplicated, perhaps reflecting that Louisa and Thomas were cousins.

except the real estate which was held in trust by the executors for his, and any heir's, benefit. The Will also granted small bequests to a number of female Thomson relatives, including Eliza Thomson and Amelia Dingley, daughters of his uncle Frederick. They lived in Tunbridge Wells, at No. 1, Priory, Church Road. The 1861 census records Amelia as a widow aged 61: she had previously married Captain William Augustus Dingley RA. Her sister, Eliza Thomson, was four years older.

### **Belvedere after the death of Thomas Thomson**

Arthur and Elizabeth Thomson lived in Belvedere after Thomas' death, until 1865 when Elizabeth died, aged 55. She was buried in Trinity, the officiating minister being Edward Hoare. The *Tunbridge Wells Gazette* (22 December) noted that she was *'deeply lamented by all who knew her'*. Arthur then left Tunbridge Wells to settle in his London home, 12 Pembridge Villas. He died in London in October 1892 but was buried with his wife and parents back in Holy Trinity. There is a memorial stone to the family in one of the upper meeting rooms. Their bodies were interred in the graveyard attaching to the church (recorded as in rows 30 and 33). In his Will, Arthur left his personal assets to his housekeeper and her family, any real estate reverting to the Thomson family. His father's medical qualification certificates and official



appointment documents were auctioned by Sotheby's in June 1908 for £13.50, and are now in the archives of the Wellcome Library, alongside his commonplace notebook and diary.

Subsequent occupiers of Belvedere were also doctors. By 1901 the site had been acquired by Dr Francis Bisshopp after which he proceeded to have the house demolished and a new one built – Parham House – itself dismantled (and rebuilt as Frant End, now 142 Forest Road, Tunbridge Wells) to make way for the new Ritz cinema which was opened in December 1934. **DB**

*\* It is possible that Thomson, with the Barretts, actually developed the three Priory houses, and Arthur, perhaps, the three houses facing the Town Hall called Dyott Terrace. Readers may like to compare the small crest on the left-hand building with the Thomson arms above. Ed.*

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## Other Groups

### **Kent History Federation**

The KHF One-day Conference will be hosted this year by the Smarden Local History Society, and will take place on Saturday 11th June. Smarden is one of the old weaving villages in the Kentish Weald. The cloth industry was encouraged by Edward III who granted the village a charter in 1333 to hold a weekly market and annual fair. It became prosperous and some fine houses were built in the 15th and 16th centuries, many of which remain today. The conference runs from 9:45 (registration from 9:15) through to tea at 4:00pm, with talks in the morning and visits in the afternoon. One item of particular interest is the Kent Heritage Resource Centre - a facility set up with support from the Kent Archaeological Society which provides an archival camera and cataloguing software for use by local groups.

The conference costs £12.50 per person, plus £8 for lunch. If you would like further details please contact Chris Jones (details on page 3), or see [www.kenthistoryfederation.org](http://www.kenthistoryfederation.org).

### **Kent History and Library Centre**

The KHLC in Maidstone is hosting a series of talks 'Reading Kent's Past' between February and November this year. They cover a range of subjects: interpreting Shakespeare in April and May; the life of Kingsley Wood, Kentish MP and wartime Chancellor in June; then William Lambarde in September; papermaking in Maidstone in October; and finishing with the Manorial Documents Register in November. All except the April talk take place on Thursdays at 6:30, and cost £5. For more details please contact Chris Jones.

### **Friends of Woodbury Park Cemetery**

The FWPC are planning guided tours of the memorials in Frant and Speldhurst churchyards on Saturday 6th August. Non-members are welcome if numbers permit - please contact [bushell327@btinternet.com](mailto:bushell327@btinternet.com) if you are interested.

### **High Weald Walks**

For those of you whose interests are not wholly focussed on local history, the Tunbridge Wells Museum & Art Gallery has organised a series of four nature walks led by Ian Beavis. These will look at the plant, animal and insect life of different High Weald habitats. They are on Saturday mornings between 4th June and 3rd September. For more details please contact the Museum on 01892 554171.

### Roger Joye previews our talks for the coming quarter

Our meeting on **12<sup>th</sup> May** will be held in **Calverley House** - the ex-NPI building at the corner of Calverley and Camden Roads. The talk is by **Mark Moody** from **The Skinners' School** and is entitled '**Notes from a Sustainable STEM School**'. Mark will explain how the school has embedded 'closed loop' education into its curriculum. 'Closed Loop' refers to the natural cycles that occur in nature and which involve very little wastage. They form a model for how a business can save money by designing a product right from the beginning that has the fewest numbers of (energy-wasting) steps at each stage, and which also has value because the product (or parts of it) is designed to be recycled at the end of its useful life. This is what The Ellen MacArthur Foundation calls the 'Circular Economy' and is being taken up by the likes of Phillips, Cisco, Renault and Unilever.

The staff at Skinners' have been getting their pupils to go 'loopy' and think about STEM projects that can be built, based on what these natural cycles can teach us. In 2015 Skinners' projects won several prestigious awards, including 'South East Young Engineers of the Year', 'Kent Messenger Bright Sparks' and the Brighton University 'Best Eco-Project'. These awards come on top of the school's five consecutive Green Flag Awards, and its position as an Eco-Schools 'Ambassador School'.

For our next talk we return to the **Town Hall**, though with a change to the advertised programme. On **June 9th**, **John Cunningham**, Chair of our Local History Group, will talk about '**Crested China**': one of the most popular and affordable tourist souvenirs in Britain. Produced from the 1870s up to 1939, these were small pieces of translucent white china, generally less than two inches high, moulded in a huge variety of shapes and embossed with the coat-of-arms of the place in which they were sold.

The shapes varied from animals (cats, dogs, rabbits, pigs etc) and domestic items such as urns, jugs, vases, watering cans, etc. to lighthouses, the Coronation Chair and even Toad Rock (all obviously very miniature). During the First World War they included tanks, guns, artillery and planes. Priced at 6d or a 1/- they sold in their millions and many people had large collections. Although no longer produced, they are still collected by a small number of enthusiasts, at prices which now vary generally between £5 - £50.

John has his own collection of about eighty pieces (seventy being specific to Tunbridge Wells). His talk will cover the origin, development and demise of these now largely-forgotten tourist souvenirs.



A Tunbridge Wells piece



# CIVIC SOCIETY

## Forthcoming Events

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.

<b>May 12th</b>	<p><b>‘Notes from a Sustainable STEM School’</b></p> <p>An explanation by Mark Moody of how The Skinners’ School’s curriculum has embodied principles for saving energy and money.</p> <p><b>Calverley House - the ex-NPI building at the corner of Calverley and Camden Roads</b></p>
<b>June 9th</b>	<p><b>‘Crested China’</b></p> <p>John Cunningham describes this largely forgotten tourist souvenir that in its day sold in millions</p> <p><b>Town Hall</b></p> <p>(This is a change to our advertised programme.)</p>
<b>July 9th (Sat)</b>	<p><b>Annual Garden Party</b></p> <p>At <b>Hungershall Lodge</b>, by kind permission of Mr and Mrs Ian Marshall. See page 2 for details.</p>
<b>Aug 4th (Thur)</b>	<p><b>Visit to the Romney Marsh Churches</b></p> <p>Please see page 2 for details.</p>

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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