Annual Garden Party

Holden House, Southborough. Saturday July 21st.
Tickets (which must be bought in advance) are £10 each.
Please contact Christo Skelton, address at bottom of page 3, and include sae.

Visit to Battle Abbey

Saturday August 18th. See page 22.

NEW Visit to the new Kent History Centre

Thursday October 4th. See page 22.

JOHN GOODFELLOW (1924-2012)

John Goodfellow, a very active member of the Society for many years, died peacefully on June 7th at the age of 87, surrounded by his family and following a short illness.

John was very well known in Tunbridge Wells as a citizen activist. He belonged to many societies and organisations but was also a prolific letter writer to the Courier on the quality of life in the town, on traffic, transport, safety, access and mobility issues, and on the medical services.

He was a good, moral and determined man with complete integrity and a very strong sense of responsible citizenship. He also had an impish sense of humour. He made a major contribution to the life of Tunbridge Wells, particularly in the last seven years as a founder and very active member of the Town Forum. John could be counted on to cut through the waffle, the smokescreens and the prevarification which have so often clouded the running of the town - to get at the truth which he presented in terms which no one could misunderstand. I am proud to have worked with him on the Town Forum over these years.

John was a Chartered Patent Officer all his career. He leaves two sons, a daughter, six grandchildren and a great grandson, his wife Patricia having died two years ago. He leaves a large void for his family and a legacy to the Tunbridge Wells community of integrity and responsibility. We shall all miss him.

John Cunningham
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Editor: Chris Jones. 52 St James Road, Tunbridge Wells, TN1 2LB
Tel 01892 522025 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
Jubilee ... I did consider having a Jubilee theme for this Newsletter. Fiona Woodfield found a reference to a special drink created for the Coronation by Fry’s of Tunbridge Wells. It was made from orange and pineapple and sugar. And John Sworder provided a description of a royal visit to Fordcombe. I even looked into celebrations for the jubilee of George III in 1809 (which I think was at the start of the fiftieth year). But the timing was all wrong. The jubilee came and it has now gone.

One thing that you might like to note is that Queen Victoria’s journals are now available on-line – www.queenvictoriasjournals.org.uk. There are 118 entries written in Tunbridge Wells, from August to November 1834 (in Mount Pleasant House), and August to September 1835 (in Boyne House on Mount Ephraim). She ‘liked Boyne House better a good deal than old Mount Pleasant ... much better air’. There are two versions - one in Victoria’s own hand, and one in purple typescript by Lord Esher which is much easier to read.

How Proud Are You? ... On June 23rd, Civic Voice, the national organisation of civic societies, will be asking communities across the country ‘how proud are you of where you live?’ While we may not be having a formal survey within Tunbridge Wells, it is a good question to ask ourselves. Brian Lippard’s article on page 20 demonstrates perhaps a potential pride, with the message that more could be done.

Remembering Rosemary ... Another loss to the Society - Rosemary Beales died on 2nd April. She had been involved with the Society since its earliest days. She and her husband Walter Coltham came to Tunbridge Wells with their young family in 1947. In the 1950s they became involved with other young radicals like Don Joyce and Philip Whitbourn, and in 1959 the forerunner of the Civic Society was created in their drawing room at 4 St James Road.

Walter died in 1971 as the Society was fighting plans for an Arndale Centre in the town. Rosemary later married Alan Beales, who was Secretary to the Society. They were also involved in the creation of Trinity, and the Young Concert Artists Competition, and somehow found time to cross Siberia and travel overland to India. In 1997 they hosted the Society Garden Party in Lansdowne Road. She recently lived in Beulah Road.
New proposals for the **Kent and Sussex Hospital site** have now been seen. These are for a reduced (about 235) number of homes, half town-houses, and half flats in small blocks in a formal layout with many trees but little public open space; and commercial blocks on the Mt Ephraim frontage. The developer, St James, focusses on the upper end of the market and expects to start work immediately his plans are approved. He is building a largely pastiche scheme on the site of Queen Mary’s Hospital Roehampton, and we have told him we would prefer a distinctive scheme for Tunbridge Wells.

We have considered proposals for a new Thai restaurant **Sucheera** in a Decimus Burton building on the east side of Calverley Road. The proposals are for a new shopfront and extensive signage. We find the shopfront proposals acceptable, but the signage excessive, especially in respect of lettering on the stucco frontage of the first floor which oversails the windows. We believe there is no other signage at first floor level in this part of Calverley Road, and have made an objection.

**Blue Cedars, Langton Road** is a 1950s Colt bungalow which the owners wish to replace with a two-storey house with high energy efficiency. Adjacent houses are mainly mid-Victorian coach houses and converted stables originally attached to the Nevill Park mansions. Previous applications have been refused twice, and the owners are appealing against the second refusal while submitting an amended application. The Council has argued that the ridge height of the new house should not exceed that of the adjacent Victorian coach-house, which is not really compatible with modern construction standards. We have written in support of the current application.

Consent was granted in 2006 for three houses on part of a derelict garage site in **Cambridge Gardens**. This is now due for renewal. We feel it is undesirable to approve partial development of this site, and although our previous objections were not successful we have objected again that any approval should be related to development of the whole site, even if it can not be wholly implemented at present.

We have also objected to proposals for **69/71 Culverden Down**, a steeply sloping site which has been the subject of earlier proposals for flats, the most recent of which was dismissed on appeal. The present proposal is for a semi-detached pair of elaborate 4/5 storey houses with balconies and bays. Because of the slope the development is not greatly out of keeping with adjoining villas from the road side (north-western elevation) but will be highly conspicuous and out of keeping from Connaught Way at the rear.
Those who attended the Annual Awards Evening in May will have heard our Past President, Dr Philip Whitbourn’s, summary of over fifty year’s activities and achievements of the RTWCS and its predecessor, the 59 Society. Philip did exceptionally well, managing to cover them all in the short time available on the evening. For those of you who missed it we hope to produce a document recording the history of the Society. It is particularly relevant at this time for people to appreciate what the Civic Society can achieve with the support of its members.

It is all too easy to accept a situation as impossible to change or challenge. How many times do you hear someone say “That’s wrong, someone should do something about it”. But how often is the speaker prepared to be that ‘someone’ or part of a group that will challenge the situation.

I was thinking only recently of the things once considered the norm that have changed in my lifetime. When I started driving there was no legal limit of how much you could drink before driving, it was down to what the individual considered acceptable. There were no seat belts in cars and when they were proposed there was a reluctance to wear them for all sorts of spurious reasons. Cigarette smoke spoilt the atmosphere in theatres and restaurants; the top deck of buses was a fog to be avoided. And who would have thought that people could be persuaded to pick up their dog’s mess on the street? All these changes have improved the quality of life for the majority.

It may have been due to the battles fought and won by my predecessors, or maybe I was just fortunate, but my last period as chairman 2000/01 was fairly quiet. I saw that the Society’s functions were twofold; I termed them Campaigning and Social. Campaigning covered civic and planning matters, talking to developers and liaising with TWBC. The Social aspect covered the programme of talks, the Garden Party and the Annual Awards.

Campaigning was the lesser of the two activities then, but now the ratio has swung in the other direction. Alastair, my predecessor in this role, was very active in the discussions regarding the previous but one Council Leaders plans regarding the Civic Complex which involved a huge amount of his time. Fortunately Bob Atwood managed to dispel some of the controversy by ‘pressing the pause button’ and setting up the Town Planning Panel. There are however still a number of issues beyond our...
normal monthly scrutiny of planning applications. The former ABC site and the former Kent and Sussex Hospital are major developments in which the RTWCS is rightly expected to have an opinion and to try to influence the owners, architects and planners.

The Government’s plans for the ‘Big Society’ promoting involvement in civic issues and neighbourhood plans require community involvement. Unfortunately many people whose knowledge, experience and energy would be of great benefit in this activity are busy raising families and/or building or safeguarding their careers – particularly the latter in the current economic climate. The RTWCS expects to play a role in this activity and this will impose a greater workload on the Executive Committee. As a result we have formed the subgroups outlined in earlier newsletters and will be reorganising the Executive functions. Our plans will be outlined in future issues of the newsletter.

I can’t finish this letter without mentioning the Queen’s Jubilee. It is sad that the organisation and hard work of so many was marred by such appalling weather. However Tunbridge Wells did manage the organisation and weather perfectly for the Royal Visit of the Earl and Countess of Wessex. I am fortunate to be your chairman in the Jubilee Year as I was presented to the Countess as the representative of RTWCS at an informal reception. Ten minutes before the arrival of the Royal couple those present were arranged into groups of eight. To my surprise I was told that I would be introducing my group to the Countess. I did not know any of them and without glasses was unable to read their name badges which also said who they were representing. Fortunately my short term memory did not let me down, but I needn’t have worried as the Countess was charming and put us all at ease. Being the last group to be introduced and as Prince Edward had managed to finish with his groups earlier he joined us and we were the only group to have the honour of meeting both of them.

Following the reception we were able to walk through the Town in beautiful weather to witness the tree planting on the Common. A truly memorable day in which the town was at its best reminding me of what a joy it is to live here.

John Forster
Awards

This year’s Civic Society Awards were presented by Dr Philip Whitbourn, past President of the Society, and by Cllr Elizabeth Thomas, Mayor of Tunbridge Wells.

Awards were given to 18, Calverley Park (left), Mansard House, Mt Ephraim (below left), Hollamby House, 17 Frant Rd (bottom), 73 London Rd, and the Women’s World Day of Prayer (Commercial Rd) (opposite, left and right).

The White House in Commercial Road (not shown) was given a Commendation.

TWBC and the Friends of Sherwood Lake were recognised for the landscaping of the Medway Road development (above) and the achievement of village-green status for Sherwood Lake (opposite).
Shop-front awards were given to Pigwidegon & Pie (below right), Moss (below left), and to Blott and The White Company.
After nearly a century the First World War continues to fascinate, and not just professional historians. But attention has moved from the military and political to the social, and the impact of so much change and loss on communities, often small close-knit ones.

Clive Roberts set out to identify the 116 men (all men) whose names appear on the Rusthall war memorial adjoining St Paul’s Church. His story hints at the effects on a largely working class village of so many far flung adventures – in East Africa and Mesopotamia, Jutland, the Dardanelles and the North Atlantic, as well as the trenches of Flanders.

Not all died in action, some in accidents, many by disease. Many were never found, such as those drowned in the mud at Passchendaele. It’s not Roberts’ purpose to show it, but behind the heroism is an unavoidable sub-text of mismanagement and faulty intelligence, failures of command and communication, which perhaps partly explain our enduring interest in this period.

L-Cpl William Francis aged 21 died at Delville Wood, now a wood without trees, when ordered into the line at night in pouring rain and under intense shellfire; it took his battalion eleven hours to cover a mile. By contrast, Lt Hugh Latimer, at the Somme aged 19 and straight out of Rugby, was shot through the head while standing on the parapet of a captured trench urging his men on in an action in which more than half his battalion were lost.

An older man William Vidler wrote in a letter found on his body, ‘I think after all it is a fraud there is not much truth in there preaching only to get out of us what they can…’. We don’t know how William’s death was announced but the widow of Ernest Household killed at the same time was told, ‘Your dear husband died a very noble death for England…. He was a fine example of his kind, risking all for the glorious purpose of preserving his country.’

Through all this, life in Rusthall, with its two war hospitals, continued, as it did even in places much nearer to the front, with bowls matches, cricket matches, Christmas sales, and tea parties to mark the retirement of a respected minister, documented from the pages of the Courier. Roberts has made a valuable contribution to local history, as well as to descendants of those commemorated on the memorial. Alastair Tod

Rusthall’s Fallen by Clive Roberts

Price £12.99. Available from Waterstones, and from Venture and the Red Lion in Rusthall
Who was Pauline Gower?

Pauline Gower was a well-known aviator in the 1930s, a friend of Amy Johnson, and influential in the world of flying at that time. She also played an important role in promoting the cause of women in World War 2.

So why have so few people heard of her, not least in the town where she was born and grew up?

I first found out about Pauline from the extensive scrap books compiled by her father. These are kept in the local studies collection at Tunbridge Wells library, and are very informative about her life and career and the world she lived in.

Pauline Gower was born on 22nd July 1910, the younger daughter of Robert and Dorothy Gower. Sir Robert Vaughan Gower was a solicitor who became involved in politics. He was mayor of Tunbridge Wells, MP for Hackney and then later for Gillingham, a seat he held for nearly 20 years.

He and his family lived at Sandown Court on the Pembury Road (now the site of Skinner’s Kent Academy). Being an enlightened father he decided to send his daughters to the nearby Convent of the Sacred Heart for their education.

Pauline loved her time at Sacred Heart and soon showed her adventurous spirit by climbing all the trees in the grounds.

Pauline left school when she was 18, and although she took part in all the usual activities expected of young women of her class, she was dissatisfied with the social round and decided she wanted to do something worthwhile with her life.

A few years previously, she had taken an aeroplane flight, which she had enjoyed very much and so her thoughts turned to a life in aviation. She secretly took up flying lessons, starting in June 1930 and gained her pilot’s licence in October, becoming the first female pilot to take a solo flight after only seven hours in the air.

Pauline had made friends whilst training with a girl named Dorothy Spicer. They decided to fly to France and borrowed a plane from Amy Johnson. They managed to lose their maps overboard on the journey, flew too close to the sea over the Channel and lost their way several times over France.

She gained her pilot's licence aged 20.
Somehow they managed to return home safely and planned to fly to Karachi in the future. Their families opposed this plan, so instead they started their own aviation business, the first such company to be owned and wholly run by women. Pauline gained her commercial pilot’s licence (the first British woman to do so, and only the third woman in the world). This enabled her to carry passengers and with Dorothy as engineer they started their company, Air Trips Ltd, offering joy rides and commercial taxi services. They had many misadventures during this period, including unwittingly giving a ride to an embezzler, fending off passengers who tried to climb on to the wings during flights, and living in Spartan conditions to save money. Even with all this the girls loved running their own business and diversified into flying shows and taking part in air circuses and pageants which brought in much needed money.

Sadly for Pauline this happy time wasn’t to last. Her mother committed suicide in November 1936, and Air Trips closed in September the same year.

However, Pauline was still very much involved in aviation, and was often asked to speak and write on the subject. She was asked by the Air Ministry to be one of the eight members on a Parliamentary sub committee on safety and low flying planes. At 28 she was the youngest member and the only woman.

With war with Germany on the horizon, Pauline campaigned for women to fly planes for the Air Transport Auxiliary. This was a civilian service that ferried planes from factory to airfield, and Pauline believed women could take the place of male pilots called up for active duty. After initially being turned down, the Air Ministry decided in December 1939 that she should head up the women’s section of the ATA and in January 1940 the first women were recruited. They came from all over the world, and were dedicated and efficient members of the ATA. They had no weapons to defend themselves against enemy planes and often flew in bad weather and in hazardous conditions, and although they carried parachutes they were never trained to use them.
Through Pauline’s continued campaigning with the Air Ministry, the women of the ATA were allowed to fly all types of aeroplane including Spitfires and heavy bombers, and she also obtained equal pay with male pilots, which was unheard of for the time. Sadly for her, she was never able to fly the fighters and bombers herself. She was promoted to commandant, and became a member of the HQ staff at White Waltham in Berkshire. She was introduced to King George VI and Queen Elizabeth when they visited the base, and in 1942, was awarded an MBE for her services to aviation.

In 1943 Pauline was appointed as a director to the Board of the British Overseas Aircraft Corporation, the first woman to obtain such a position in a national airline.

Pauline must have taken some time out from all her hard work to have a social life, for she met and became engaged to Wing Commander William Cusack Fahie. They were married on 2 June 1945 at the Brompton Oratory in London.

After the war, they set up home in Chelsea, and in 1946 Pauline became pregnant. Throughout her pregnancy, she suffered from ill health, and shortly after giving birth to twin sons Paul and Michael on 2 March 1947, she suffered a fatal heart attack.

This article is a very brief look at the life of the remarkable Pauline Gower, and I would urge anyone who wants to know more about her to read the biography written by her son Michael, and also her own account of her flying activities. SR

Further Reading
GOWER, Pauline and Spicer, Dorothy
Women with Wings
WHITTELL, Giles Spitfire Women of World War 2
FAHIE, Michael Harvest of Memories
A Radio 4 interview about Pauline Gower is available on the Internet:
www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/womanshour/20_08_01/monday/info4.shtml
And see also: www.kent.gov.uk/libraries
Pauline in the cockpit of a De Havilland
Tiger Moth, 1940. © IWM (C 380)
In the last Newsletter I mentioned an incident in 1824 when a labouring man of Tunbridge Wells put a halter around his wife’s neck and led her to the market place, presumably the one in the Pantiles. There he sold her to the highest bidder for £3.

This practice of ‘wife-selling’ was deprecated by polite society, but was regularly reported in the newspapers. Historian EP Thompson estimated that there were some 400 cases recorded between 1780 and 1840. At a time when divorce required a private Act of Parliament it was one way of formally dissolving an unsatisfactory partnership, though the practice had no legal sanction. In many cases, or so it is said, the wife and her purchaser were already lovers.

Divorce law changed fundamentally with the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857. Divorce was taken out of the hands of the church courts and of Parliament, but it was still very expensive and there were only a few hundred cases each year. One early case related to Tunbridge Wells, and raised important questions about the nature of evidence.

Henry Lindsell Sopwith was a surgeon from Essex. He came to Tunbridge Wells in the 1830s. In 1851 he was living with his wife and 14 year old daughter at no1 Calverley Parade (see picture on page 17). His wife died in 1854, and in 1857 he married again. His new wife was Matilda Deane, aged 32. By then he was 48 or thereabouts, what the Daily News described as ‘somewhat advanced in life’. They had met when Matilda and her parents were visiting the town. Her father, Charles Deane, was a noted landscape painter.

Initially all went well. The Sopwiths, together with Henry’s daughter, often visited Matilda’s parents, who were staying at Stellenburg House in London Road. But the relationship seemed to cool and in May 1858, the Deanes tackled Henry about it. Mrs Deane accused him of treating her daughter as little more than a housekeeper. When asked whether he still loved her, he replied ‘not as I did’. The Deanes took Matilda away to Cheltenham. Henry wrote to her, saying that on her return he did not want her visiting them again. She never did return.

The Deanes suspected that Henry was involved with some other woman, and employed an ex-detective called Shaw to investigate. After a number of months Shaw had discovered nothing. A second detective, called Topp, was brought in. Topp was more successful.

His suspicions centred on Mary Ann Prickett, aged about 24. She had been a servant to Sopwith prior to his second marriage, but had recently been living in London. Her father, a farm bailiff in
The 1857 Act was unequal in that it allowed a man to sue for divorce on the basis of his wife’s adultery, but a wife had to cite adultery plus some other cause. Perhaps because of this, the Deanes and Matilda only petitioned for a legal separation. The case was heard on 23rd and 24th December, 1859.

The judge was Sir Cresswell Cresswell (yes that really was his name) who had been put in charge of the new Probate and Divorce Court in 1858. There had been doubts about his suitability “a confirmed bachelor, with an irascible judicial temper”, but in the event he was judged a success, “upholding the sanctity of marriage while vindicating the rights of outraged spouses”. Having listened to the arguments of both sides, Cresswell had a ‘very decided opinion’ of the facts.

He was clearly influenced by the involvement of ‘men of the class to which Shaw and Topp belong’. While accepting that detectives employed by the police might be employed to the benefit of the public, a private detective whose income depended upon what he uncovered ‘becomes a most dangerous agent’.

William Thomas Topp did actually have extensive police experience. In the 1830s he had been a clerk working for the then relatively new Metropolitan Police (founded in 1829). In 1841 he was an ‘inspector of police’ in Finsbury. In 1851 he was a police officer in Lincolnshire (I have no explanation for this change of location). But to Cresswell,
investigation was best left to attorneys ‘regularly educated’ and responsible to the courts for their conduct.

Sopwith’s counsel had already demolished Topp’s ‘Henrietta Pearce’ theory by introducing the surgeon who had attended her confinement. He confirmed that Prickett was not Pearce. Cresswell then turned to the credibility of James Buss as a witness. Buss had already admitted sharing a gin-and-water with Topp at the White Bear and Kentish Tap. And though he denied a claim by the landlord of the latter that Topp had promised to pay him ‘better than the other side’, he did admit to receiving 5 shillings from him.

As for the neighbours: Chatfield, Diggens and Armstrong, Cresswell considered their testimony ‘preposterous’, and contrary to all probability. By contrast he was impressed by Mary Ann, ‘her appearance and demeanour were singularly in her favour’. Sopwith’s explanation for her nightly visits - that he employed her to copy out details of births and deaths (he was the local registrar) - was both plausible and praiseworthy, being an attempt to ease the family’s financial situation.

Cresswell considered Sopwith badly treated. He thought that Topp had ‘got up’ the evidence. Had Sopwith and Prickett’s behaviour been so blatant how was it that Shaw had found no evidence in nearly a year?

Matilda’s petition was rejected. Cresswell considered it monstrous that he was unable to award costs to Sopwith (rules intended to ensure that costs were not a barrier to wives seeking a divorce).

It would be easy to see Cresswell as part of a Victorian conspiracy against women. These days we would be looking for financial motives in Sopwith’s second marriage. In 1851 he was described as a ‘retired surgeon’. Had his first wife, youngest daughter of a successful linen draper, contributed to the family income, so that he didn’t need to work? Did he need to replace this income when she died?

Cresswell, though, was required to decide on the evidence actually presented in court, and evidence from private detectives was suspect. A year earlier, another judge had complained about the employment of a detective called Field, saying that the people of England held such spies in utter abhorrence. Even police detectives were disliked. In Lady Audley’s Secret (1862) they were described as ‘stained with vile associations and unfit company for honest gentlemen’.

The Sopwith case was widely reported in the national press. The Tunbridge Wells Gazette made no editorial comment, but did reprint an article from The Times about the dangers of using private detectives to check on spouses. It was apparently common in France, where there was an association called Société pour faire Suivre les Maris but should it spread to England, then ‘farewell to all
Nos 1 and 2 Calverley Parade - where the library is today. The picture is much later than the story. In 1859, there was no Opera House. There were two large houses and gardens on the Opera House site, with a meadow behind. Monson Road did not exist, just an access road to a stable-yard.

James Buss, the groom, stated that on the night of June 29th 1858 Mr Sopwith and Mary Prickett came in very late. Watching from outside, he “saw what appeared to be two shadows of persons taking off their clothes ... One shadow appeared to be that of a lady, the other that of a gentleman.”

domestic confidence and happiness’. The country, thought The Times, may well be grateful to Sir Cresswell Cresswell for striking a decisive blow at this wicked practice.

In 1860 Sopwith brought a case against Matilda for Restitution of Conjugal Rights. Such cases were usually futile in the sense of re-uniting a couple, and were more to do with recovering costs. Matilda never did come back. At the time of the 1861 and 1871 censuses she was living with her parents in Ilfracombe.

Sopwith remained in Calverley Parade until he died in 1880. In March 1860 he was made Hon Asst Surgeon to the local company of the Kent Rifle Volunteers - was this perhaps the local establishment demonstrating their confidence in him. His daughter, Emily, had married in 1859, prior to the trial, and moved away.

And what of Mary Ann Prickett? It is difficult to be sure, as surprisingly, the name and place/year of her birth are not unique; but she may have married and moved to London. Her mother, if I have identified her correctly, lived in Tunbridge Wells for the next 30 years.

This question of identification - of evidence - is a problem for historians as much as for judges. If I have the right Mary Ann Prickett, then her birth and early years are also intriguing. In 1841, aged 5, she appears to have been living with her mother, an unmarried servant in a farmhouse in Lamberhurst. The person I have assumed to be her father is the unmarried 25-year old son of the farmer. What, one wonders, was going on there?

As for Topp, he was later involved in the Codrington divorce case of 1864, another fascinating story. CJ
The Garden Party this year is to be held in the grounds of Holden House, Southborough. It is a splendid building in a fine setting, recently rescued from near-ruin by Julie and Alistair Levack. Little is known of the actual building, but we are able to identify some of its past owners.

The present Holden House appears to be of 18th century construction, but we have no definite information on its exact date or who built it. There are, however, references to ‘Holden’ as a place or as an ‘estate’ as far back as the 13th century, and there was probably a house there in Tudor times.

The property was associated in the 16th and 17th centuries with the Latter family, a well-known local name. John Latter, a wealthy clothier, lived there towards the end of that period.

In the 1730s it came into the ownership of Francis Austen, Steward of Southborough. He only held it for a short time. Local expert, Fiona Woodfield, suggests that he might have sold it when he took on guardianship of his orphaned nephew George (Jane’s father).

From 1737 the property was owned by William Bowen, a local iron-master. He owned furnaces at Cowden and perhaps Barden Furnace at Speldhurst as well. There is a Bowen mortar at the Royal Armouries Museum near Portsmouth. At the end of the century it was sold to the Streatfeilds, another noted local family.

They sold it to John Usborne, a timber merchant, in 1806. The Usborne business is first noted in the 1790s, shipping oak and masts for the Royal Navy from Riga in the Baltic. War with France disrupted this trade, so the Usbornes switched to Canada instead. John’s brother Henry ran the Canadian end of the business from Quebec.

John, meanwhile, was extending and improving the Holden property, in particular the garden. The 1838 tithe survey describes it as having a pleasure ground of 4 acres. There are also intriguing descriptions of it from 1830 and 1840. Whether these different descriptions reflect actual changes in the property, or in the style of estate agency, is not clear.

In 1830 it was “a Mansion on a moderate scale with garden, greenhouse, double coach-house, etc”. By 1840 it had become “one of the most admired and sheltered spots in the vicinity of Tunbridge Wells ... a most comfortable and substantial mansion ... with capital stabling and all the usual offices.”

One prospective buyer was determined not to be impressed. Aretas Akers, a local magistrate, was looking for a new home. In 1842 he offered to pay only the value of the house as building materials “the house, though substantially built, is so situated that I should pull it down ... I would on no account live in [it]”.

In his property dealings Akers was something of a chancer, so we might reasonably ignore this comment. On the other hand, an ornamental lake had been created about this time on the front lawn. This should have appealed to purchasers, but it seems that it was polluted by
effluent from the nearby tan-yard.

The house was sold in 1842 to Thomas Lotherington of Southborough Hall. His widow and four grown-up children were living there in 1851, but she seems to have let the house during the 1850s. There are references first to a Rev. John Bourne, and then to Henry Wood, a retired civil servant from the Honourable East India Company. He wrote to the press in 1853 about growing lupins from seed sent from Egypt.

The Indian connection carried through to the next owner, Philip Woolley, a retired Indian Army lieutenant, still only in his 40’s with a young family. Woolley made further changes to the garden, with specimen trees and a new water garden. It was later described as “a perfectly preserved Victorian garden”, and as “delightfully shaded pleasure grounds” with “shrubberies, fine banks of rhododendrons, Italian flower garden and rosary...Wilderness Walks, etc”. Woolley meanwhile sold off part of the estate for development - Edward St, Elm, Forge and Western Roads, etc; but he also donated land for church and educational use. Woolley Road was named after him.

In 1887 it was for sale again as ‘an old-fashioned country residence’. The new owner was the Rev Beauchamp St John Tyrwhitt, a retired clergyman, previously vicar of Upchurch.

In the 20th century the house had at least four owners: Mrs Morley, John McCulloch, Alex Henderson, and finally Godfrey Phillips, tobacco magnate and a founder of the Southborough Society.

I think that ‘Godfrey’ may have been the son ‘Artie’ of Mrs Phillips of 44 Broadwater Down, who was ‘very rich’ according to Richard Cobb (Still Life p74). The previous occupant of no.44 was Henry Vandenburgh, possibly (probably?) her brother. The Vandenburghs were from Stoke Newington (Clissold Road, I might add). The Phillips were from Muswell Hill. A brother and sister of one family married a sister and brother from the other. The Vandenberghs were Dutch margarine manufacturers (as in ‘Stork’), the Phillips were tobacco manufacturers.

These details are fascinating, but they could have been of no more than academic interest. After Godfrey’s death the house became a care home and the gardens were put up for sale. Many thanks are therefore due to the Levacks for rescuing it and restoring it as a family home. CJ
The Tunbridge Wells Experience

Until last month, the last time I visited Tunbridge Wells was in the summer of 2011. My wife suggested we join a coach trip for a day out there. I wasn’t keen as I remembered my previous visit. We had been on a trip to Hastings and our coach stopped at the Pantiles for morning coffee. There weren’t many people about. In particular, the Corn Exchange seemed like a morgue. We retreated to the Upper Walk where, at least, there was a choice of coffee shops. We returned to our coach and drove through the town. We went through a narrow street and I observed a boarded-up supermarket. We then went up what I assume must be their main street. It was so sad to see how many shops were closed. My last image of Tunbridge Wells was as we turned right at traffic lights. Even the Town Hall was closed.

What a difference eight years has made! Our coach arrived at the Pantiles and we were met by a lady and gentleman in Regency dress. It was really pleasant to hear them talk in the language of their time. I tried to catch him out by asking if he liked ice cream “Ah, you mean iced sweetmeats” he replied and then went on to regale me with the pleasures of this dessert. They took us along the Walks, giving us details of the history and of the saucy goings-on of the time. Unlike our last visit, you could feel a “buzz” about the place. In particular, the Corn Exchange was now a very up-market flea market.

After coffee, we were met by a registered guide who explained all the things we could do. We were given special day passes which gave us free travel within the town and generous discounts at selected restaurants. The guide gave us a brief visit to the King Charles the Martyr church before leading us a short distance to the end of the High Street and the cable-car station. Tourists were given priority usage of alternate gondolas. (I thought back to my previous visit and wondered if the Tunbridge Wellians now regarded tourists as a benefit rather than an unnecessary evil.)

Four of our party climbed into the gondola and off we went. There was an intermediate stop near the railway station and then we were off again up a hill. We were half way up before I recognised this was the same hill which had had so many closed shops. How it had changed! (I learnt afterwards how the council had reduced vehicular traffic in the town. In addition to the cable car system, they had built large multi-storey car parks at strategic entry points to the town and slashed parking charges. Further, Tunbridge Wells is now recognised as by far the best place to stay if you want to

This article is reproduced from the August 2019 edition of the UK's leading on-line website “Best Days Out”.

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explore Kent and Sussex.)

We alighted from our gondola at the entrance to the main shopping arcade. From here we could explore the shops, visit the museum and decide where we would use our tourist voucher for lunch. My wife loved the wonderful display of costumes. Whilst I spent a little time with her here, I soon went off and looked at other parts of the modern, spacious museum. They had a video demonstrating how Tunbridgeware had been made. They also had displays of how the town had changed, was changing and plans for the future. One possibility is to extend the gondolas to the Sainsbury’s site.

After lunch my wife was keen to go back for another visit to see the costumes; they really have an amazing collection. Fortunately, the town’s tourist department had thought this might happen and had laid on taster sessions at the croquet and bowls clubs for us men to try.

In mid-afternoon, we all met up with our guide in Calverley Grounds. From here we could go with her on a guided walk through what she called “The Village”, visit the shops in the High Street or simply catch the gondola from the station and spend more time in the Pantiles. It’s worth noting that the High Street is now the place to do your boutique shopping. The estate agents were persuaded to move out.

At 3.30pm the various costumed actors convened at the bandstand to perform a short comedy and engage in further conversation with visitors. A small group of minstrels playing instruments from two hundred years ago, stood on a small gallery overlooking us.

The last stage of our day out was a trip on the Spa Valley railway. In addition to a sumptuous cream tea, it was an experience of pure nostalgia. Everywhere and everyone was dressed as if it was the 1950’s. Finally, our coach met us at Eridge station.

‘Sherwood’ - an update

In the last issue we pondered the source of the name ‘Sherwood’ - the mansion on Pembury Road built by John and Sarah Guy in the late 1860s, and the nearby estate that was built after the war and named after it. The only connection we could see was that Sherwood was Sarah Guy’s mother’s maiden name. But why, we asked, would John Guy name his new house after a mother-in-law he had never met?

Joan Matthews (nee Guy) has found a possible explanation in a family will. It seems that in 1864 a trust was established for the benefit of Sarah Guy. Although the source of the money is not indicated (nor, unfortunately, the actual amount) the trustee was Joseph Sherwood, a wealthy bachelor uncle. So the Guys had access to what could reasonably be called ‘Sherwood money’ and the timing is right too. 1864 is more or less when they came to Tunbridge Wells.

I think we might have our answer. CJ
Visit to Battle Abbey
Saturday August 18th  2pm

Open to all members of the Society, their friends and families. Discounted entrance fee (free for members of English Heritage) with reduced prices in the cafe and gift shop. A guided tour has been arranged. Transport arrangements will depend upon numbers. If you are interested please contact Lionel Anderson (538307).

Visit to Kent Archives

The new Kent History and Library Centre is now open in Maidstone. This purpose-built facility combines library, local history centre, and archives. An organised tour of the new facilities has been arranged for Thursday October 4th. If you are interested please contact John Cunningham (534599).

Other Societies

Friends of Woodbury Park Cemetery

Sat. 15th July  “Red, White, and Blue” - a Diamond Jubilee brass band concert paying tribute to the many Victorian soldiers, sailors, and their redoubtable spouses buried in Woodbury Park. (If wet the event will move to the St Johns Church Hall.)

The Burtons’ St Leonards Society

The Burtons’ St Leonards Society has been celebrating the 250th anniversary of James Burton, developer of St Leonards and builder of large parts of Bloomsbury and Regent’s Park (and father of Decimus). As a finale they are holding a Grand Ball and Banquet at the Royal Victoria Hotel on Saturday, 28th July. To order tickets, £65 each, please ring  01424 422090 or email  francjhn@aol.com.
Heritage Open Days in and around Tunbridge Wells:
Thursday 6th to Sunday 9th September

Arrangements are well in hand for this year’s programme, again likely to be around forty venues and events. A number of new events are being lined up, including a walk led by Chris Jones on ‘Ferndale and the early years of St James’s’, tying in with St James’s Church 150th anniversary exhibition; also a walk led by Alan Legg on ‘Historic Transport in Tunbridge Wells’. Further afield, Hoppers in Capel (see right), has a four day celebration of the building’s four uses: as agricultural workers’ cottages; the Rose and Crown public house; a hop pickers’ hospital and a residential facility, mainly used by London churches.

Look out for full programme details on websites from July and in leaflets from late August and in particular remember to check booking arrangements.

It is not too late for more offers or suggestions. New ideas and venues are always needed – we follow up roughly three suggestions for every one new venue or event which appears in the programme. If you live or work in a building of historic interest, do consider taking part in Heritage Open Days. Private houses usually open by booked visits only, so it need not be too daunting. Sometimes a stop at an interesting private house can be incorporated in a guided walk without specific details of that house needing to be included in the advertising. Contact the local organiser Fiona Woodfield on 01892 544429 for more details.

Our thanks to David Wakefield, who is stepping down from the essential task of sorting out the Heritage Open Days banners. We need someone new to volunteer to do this task. It entails a bit of work early in the summer lining up suitable places to put them (generally regular locations which we have used for several years); making arrangements for getting them into place in August and then packed away after the event in September. This is not a major task, but is essential for effective publicity. The new volunteer(s) should be good at organising and fit enough to put some of the banners in place, around August and September. In addition, volunteers to take telephone bookings for particular events, (needed for the week or so before the weekend) are always welcome. Please contact Fiona if you can help.

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

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

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<th>Date</th>
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| July 21st (Sat) | **Annual Garden Party**  
At Holden House, Southborough, by kind permission of Julie and Alistair Levack. This event is open to Civic Society members and their guests, but tickets must be bought in advance. Please see page 2. |
| Aug 18th (Sat) | **Visit to Battle Abbey**  
Local History Group visit, but open to all. Please see page 22.                                                                                   |
| Sept 6th-9th | **Heritage Open Days**  
Please see page 23, and check www.tunbridgewellsheritageopendays.org.                                                                 |
| Sept 13th  | **‘Servants of the Empire’** a talk by Sue Brown and Ann Bates on some of the early burials at Hawkenbury Cemetery - members of the Army, Navy, and Indian Civil Service and their families. (Please note that the planned talks for September and October have been switched.) |
| Oct 4th    | **Visit to new Kent History and Library Centre, Maidstone**  
Afternoon visit, by the Local History Group, but open to all. Please see page 22.                                                               |