

# BACS

## Newsletter May 2003 No. 40

*Benenden Amenity and Countryside Society*

### Dates for your Diary:

Spring Walk – Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> May at 2pm  
16<sup>th</sup> AGM – 11<sup>th</sup> February 2004

### AGM:

The 15<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting was held on Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> February. It was announced at the meeting that Gordon Reynolds and Diana Gabriel, who has been Treasurer for 3 years, would be stepping down from the committee. The Chairman expressed his thanks for all their hard work and dedication. The new committee was also elected at the meeting, to stand for one year. Alan Milne was re-elected as Chairman of the committee and Angela Lloyd Jones was re-elected as Secretary. Dick Hill was elected as the new Treasurer. The remaining Committee members are: Lizanne Brown, Carol Varley, David Grief, Ernie Pollard, William Davies and Roger Lake.

The meeting concluded with an interesting talk by John Stafford of the Forestry Commission. He talked about both the history of Hemsted Forest as well as plans for its future. The Forest is 397 hectares in size and was bought by the Forestry Commission in 1924 for a mere £8000. Little has changed in the forest since then with the exception of fire damage during the Second World War, believed to have caused by German bombers, and damage resulting from the Hurricane of 1987. Today, Hemsted Forest is the most productive forest in Kent. The high growth rate is a consequence of the Tunbridge Wells sand, which is ideal for Pine. The Forestry Commission is currently redesigning the forest in an attempt to remove long square edges, and create more open areas. Parishioners may have noticed the tree felling which will facilitate this, and there are no plans for any further felling until 2006. The Car Park, which has existed for about 25 years, will not be expanded. However, it will be opened out to brighten the picnic area, which may also be extended.

### Clean up Benenden Day:

Thank you to everyone who helped pick up rubbish on the Benenden Clean up Day. I think everyone was surprised how much rubbish there actually was, especially on the verges of the main roads. It has made a noticeable difference, so thank you all.

### Spring Walk:

This year's Spring walk will start and finish at the Manor House in Benenden and will set off at 2pm on Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> May. The walk will take in Hemsted Forest, and is about 4 miles long. It makes for an ideal family outing. There will also be a walk of about half that length starting and finishing in the same place, which ensures that we are catering for all tastes, ages, interests and capabilities. Following the completion of the walk, tea will be served at the Manor House. Whilst drinks will be provided, food contributions will be welcomed.

## Subscriptions:

Membership is currently £2 for an individual and £5 for a family. Members receive a quarterly newsletter, which has now been redesigned. The newsletter contains details of events being organised by BACS, and items of local interest from around the parish. I'm sure you will agree this represents excellent value for money. If you have not already paid your subscription for 2003, or if you know of anyone else who may like to join BACS, please get into contact with David Grief, or any other committee member.

## Planning Matters:

The committee continues to look at planning applications for the benefit of all in Benenden. Ernie Pollard is responsible for monitoring all planning applications and submitting the Committees view where an application might be contentious. There were 47 planning applications relating to Benenden last year; we objected to just two that we thought were important to the parish as a whole. The committee has objected to the proposed extension of 'Hartleys' and the change of use of the paddock. The committee is also looking at two new applications within sensitive parts of the village

## Your new committee:

Full details of your new committee are printed below. To renew your membership, or for any questions regarding subscriptions, please contact David Grief. If you have any questions or concerns regarding planning matters, then please contact Ernie Pollard. If you would like to comment on the new-look newsletter, contribute an article, or if you would like to receive it by email, your contact is William Davies. For any other questions about BACS, please contact the Chairman, Alan Milne.

### **Alan Milne – Chairman**

Somers, Mounts Hill, Benenden, TN17 4ET  
Tel: 240819 Fax: 241109, Email: alanmilne@chartsec.co.uk

### **Dick Hill – Treasurer**

Columbanus, Off Standen Street, Iden Green, TN17 4HR  
Tel: 240517, Email: dandmhill@lineone.net

### **Angela Lloyd-Jones – Secretary**

West Winds, Cranbrook Road, Benenden, TN17 4EU  
Tel: 240354 Fax: 243064, Email: atljones75@hotmail.com

### **David Grief – Membership**

Crit Hall, Cranbrook Road, Benenden, TN17 4EU  
Tel: 241772 Fax: 240772, Email: david@grief.co.uk

### **Ernie Pollard**

Springhill Farm, Standen Street, Iden Green, TN17 4LA  
Tel: 240674, Email: erniepoll@beeb.net

### **Lizanne Brown**

Lower Standen Farm, Benenden, TN17 4LA  
Tel: 240193

### **Roger Lake**

Benenden Barn, The Street, Benenden, TN17 4BZ  
Tel: 241605

### **Carol Varley**

White Lodge, Cranbrook Road, Benenden, TN17 4EU  
Tel: 240514, Email: varleyuk@aol.com

### **William Davies**

Weald House, Iden Green, TN17 4HH  
Tel/Fax: 240723, Email: wgd@wealdhouse.co.uk

## Benenden Walks

Once again, we are grateful to Ernie Pollard who has written the fifth in a series of guided walks in the Benenden Area. Comments would be welcome on the trail, which is attached to this newsletter. Is it too long, short or inaccurate in any way? Do you enjoy reading them? Do you walk them? – please let us know. These are drafts, not finished products and eventually we hope to produce a small booklet of walks in the parish. If you know of a walk that has not yet been included, again, let us know.

## Trail 5. Iden Green, Coldharbour Road and Nineveh

Start at Iden Green cross-roads (Grid Ref. 803 316). Iden Green is thought to have been a centre of the cloth industry in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and Frame farm and Weavers Lane are local names which lend support to this. Further back still, Iden was a den (or wood-pasture, see Trail1) the “yew tree den” and Iden Green was would have been common land within the den. Yew Tree Farm at the cross-roads may mark the site of one or more ancient yews from which the Iden got its name. Take Coldharbour road westwards towards Scullsgate and Nineveh.

The recreation field on the right was given to the village by Lord Rothermere of Hemsted in 1923 and was named after Vere Harmsworth one of his two sons who died in World War I. On the left are the Thorn Cottages; run by the Almshouse Trust for the parish and managed by the parish for at least 200 years. Straight ahead is Field Lane, once part a much-used route from Iden Green to Hemsted House (Benenden School), now a private road to Field Farm. Follow Coldharbour Road round bends to the left and right.

The name Coldharbour was thought to be associated with Roman sites and here indeed it is close to the north-south Roman Road which crosses our road somewhere close to the tight bends. The idea was that a ruined Roman building survived into the Saxon period and provided shelter, a coldharbour, for people or livestock. However the current view is that the name means simply an exposed, cold, place and any association with Roman Roads is merely because the roads often followed high and exposed routes.

Coldharbour Road is one of the most strikingly sunken roads in the parish, the high banks suggesting that it carried a heavy traffic in earlier centuries. The banks have many fine trees and a rich woodland flora. Even now, in late January, celandines are in flower. On the right look out for a tall beech tree with its roots clinging to a rock-face of Tunbridge Wells Sand.

Continuing down to the gill and over the stream and take footpath **WC313** on the left by Sarnden Farm. Sarnden (an early form was Serynden) was another of the old dens to which, before Domesday, people brought their pigs for autumn foraging.

The footpath crosses grassland towards a clump of hornbeam, which provide a useful marker of the route. Looking up to the left we get views of the old pine trees of Jubilee Plantation, planted to commemorate both Lord and Lady Cranbrook’s diamond wedding and Queen Victoria’s Jubilee in 1897, and also the new windmill on the ridge at Sandhurst. The windmill is a replica of a five-sailed mill which was built in 1844 and worked until 1910; the new mill is perhaps something of a “folly”, but will be a handsome addition to the landscape when the sails are in place. After crossing more grass fields, we emerge on Hinxden Lane close to the medieval house of Diprose and its farm buildings, now dwellings.

Turn right (north) up Hinxden Road and look for very obvious badger runs on the bank on the right. Take footpath (**WC365**) left (west). At the top of the hill we can see Bedgebury Forest, with the radio mast conspicuous, and, half left and much closer, Woodsden Farm (*I think!*) with a conspicuous conservatory. At the edge of White Chimney Wood we cross an old lane which ran from Hinxden Road, below Diprose Barn to Nineveh Lane. The lane is largely destroyed the left, but it can be seen disappearing into the wood to the north (right). The lane was known as Tom Watt Lane, a name described by a Kentish place-name scholar as “delightful” and probably medieval. It was “stopped up” by the parish in 1850.

There are tall beeches along Tom Watt Lane and also along our path at the wood edge. In this area, beech is often found in such situations but rarely within the woods. This suggests that its presence locally may be often the result of planting, although it is considered native to the area. The (painful) gorse on the path, spreading into the set-aside field and the Rhododendron in the wood edge both show that the soil here is acid. Rhododendron, an introduced species, is very invasive; little grows under its shade and it supports few insect species.

Turn into the wood and over the bridge. The steep slopes of White Chimney Wood to the right are covered in woodland flowers in the spring, but now only dogs mercury shows conspicuously green. Straight ahead is Great Nineveh, one of the old farmsteads of the parish. The origin of its name is (to me) a mystery – in 1777 it was Ninivey, but no earlier mention has been found. The function of the footpaths was to link the old settlements and this path used to go through the farmstead; recently it has been diverted around it. Take footpath **WC309** northwards (right) across the field and then alongside an old track heading away from the farm.

Open fields lie ahead and a post is needed to mark the footpath in the absence of the old field boundaries. Many hedges have been lost in the Benenden countryside, although fortunately most along roadsides have survived. In some slight compensation for the loss of hedges here, there are good views; up to houses on the Cranbrook road ahead (emphasising its situation on a ridge, like many ancient route-ways). White Chimney Wood lies on the right and Little Nineveh to the left. Follow the path around the garden and turn right on emerging on to the road - turn east (right) along the road.

The field immediately on the right was known as "Tom Watt Field" in 1777 and is perhaps the site of Tomwattes Croft", mentioned in a will of 1549. The next "ditch" on the right seems to be all that is left of Tom Watt lane at its northern end. At the next road junction, an older line of the road can be seen to the right. Turn south-east (right) on to Babbs Lane. Around the junction there has been a great deal of quarrying, continuing on both sides of Babbs Lane. We are close to a rich seam of iron ore and it is possible, but not certain, that this was the material extracted. Once again, the intensity of use of the land by our forbears is evident.

Look to the right as you cross the stream and consider the possibility that there was an older crossing a few metres from the present road. On the left is Scullsgate, a farmstead with another ancient and mysterious local name. A disused road, now a footpath, leads from Scullsgate up to the Cranbrook Road, passing Parsonage Wood in its spectacular steep gill. The wood is a nature reserve (Kent Wildlife Trust) and well worth a visit, but that is for another day.

Continue along Babbs Lane, which at some point becomes Coldharbour Road on which the walk began. We pass many ancient contorted trees, mostly hornbeam, with their gnarled woody roots exposed by the erosion of the road-side banks. Small stone quarries can be seen either side of the road. Eventually we reach Sarnden Farm again, and get a view of Iden Green farmstead the other side of the road. The complex roofline around the oast kilns suggests conversion of an older barn in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

For a short way, we are retracing our steps along Coldharbour Road, but turn south (right) at footpath **WC316** along, and then alongside, another deeply-sunken disused lane. Reed Wood to the south of this lane, was known at one time as Plum Tree Wood and the lane at different times has been known as Reed Lane and Plum Tree Lane. The dense network old and current roads around Iden Green reinforces the view that it was a very busy place in the time of the clothiers in the 15<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. At some point Reed Lane is crossed by the Roman Road.

Turn north (left) up Mill Street to Iden Green cross-roads and the end of the walk. At the cross-roads is the medieval Weald House, in a commanding position on the highest ground, and the Victoria Well, provided by Lord Cranbrook to commemorate Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. An old notice prohibits the use of the well by "engines and teams" (that is, I think, steam "engines" and "teams" of horses?). The water supply from this well was often inadequate and Lord Cranbrook provided a second well, the Earl's Well, a little way down the hill towards the village opposite the "Royal Oak" cottages. The Earl's well was itself closed because of fear of lead poisoning from the pipes, and there are no obvious signs of it remaining.