

BACS

Newsletter July 2004 No. 44

Benenden Amenity and Countryside Society

Dates for your Diary:

Autumn Walk – Sunday 26th September at 2pm, from Rye harbour car park.
Exhibition Wine and Cheese Evening – Thursday 7th October at 7.30pm
AGM – Wednesday 9th February 2005, at 7.30pm in the Village Hall.

Benenden Primary School:

A public meeting was held in the Village Hall on Monday 14th June, to discuss the possibility of a new village Primary School. The meeting was opened by the Chair of the Governors, Rev. Christopher Smith. He explained that a new school has been discussed as long ago as the 1930's. It was discussed again in both the 1960's and the 1980's. However, following the 2003 Ofsted report, the need for a new school has become more urgent. This report was excellent in all areas except the facilities, which fall well below the standards of both the County Council and the Department for education and skills. Nearly all of these problems relate to the limited size of the buildings used. There is currently under 600 square metres of teaching space, when there ought to be 1200 square metres. The school office is currently in the corridor, there is no designated first aid area, and the kitchen and dining area is also used as the Reception class room. Several teachers then spoke in detail about the problems they face on a day to day basis working and caring for children in this environment.

Kent County Council has now asked David Hicken, a Planning and Development Consultant, to look at the feasibility of building a new school in the village. Mr Hicken explained that any new site has to be able to accommodate not only the new school buildings, but also external hard surfaces for play and sport, playing fields and car parking. It also needs to be situated in an area which is well related to the village accessible by both foot and car. It also needs to be capable of accommodating future expansion of the school and an enabling development such as key worker housing.

The three proposed sites are at Walkhurst Road, the Glebe Field and on the land adjoining the recreation ground. All sites have both advantages and drawbacks, and the project is still at a very early stage, so it is possible that other sites may be considered in the future. However, it is hoped that funding will be made available from the County Council in 2006 and the target date for completion of the new school is in 2008.

Benenden Exhibition:

There will be a Benenden Exhibition on display at the Cranbrook Museum during the whole of October, which is being organised by BACS. Various items, drawings and documents will be on display at this exhibition. The star exhibit will be the drawings of the Benenden Steeple, the story of which features at the end of this newsletter.

As part of this event, there will be a wine and cheese evening at the Museum on 7th October at 7.30pm. Tickets are available at £5 each for this evening. However, numbers are limited to 40 people, due to limitations of space. Tickets can be purchased on a first come first served basis from Dick Hill, who will issue a receipt to be used as a ticket on the door.

Village Trails:

A booklet containing all the Village Trails, which have been serialised in this newsletter, has now been published. This is on sale locally at £3 each. You should buy one soon if you would like a copy, as at least 75 of the 200 have been sold already.

The first four village trails can also be viewed on the internet, through the High Weald web-site at www.highweald.org. If you can't find the correct page, below is the exact URL, which you can type into the address bar on your internet browser.

http://www.highweald.org/about/visitor/walks_details.asp?routeID=91

Subscriptions:

Membership this year remains at £2 for an individual and £5 for a family. Alternatively, you can purchase a life membership for a flat rate of £50. Subscriptions are due on the 1st January every year. If you have not yet paid for this year's membership, please contact David Grief, who will send you a renewal form.

Alternatively, you can print an application form on the BACS website, which can be found at www.benendenvillage.org.uk. You can also discover the origins and objectives of the society on this site, as well as read about upcoming BACS events.

We are currently trying to increase our membership. If you know of anyone who may like to join BACS, please contact David Grief, who will ensure a form is sent. Perhaps you can encourage friends and neighbours to join. Members receive a quarterly newsletter, which contains details of events being organised by BACS, and items of local interest from around the parish.

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. BACS has also now created a new planning sub-committee, which will examine plans and sites and submit the Committee's view, where an application may be contentious. A summary of planning applications can be found on the Parish noticeboard in the village centre, and details can be seen at the Borough Council Offices in Cranbrook. If you would like to discuss any planning application with the society, please contact Ernie Pollard.

Broadband Update:

Following the Broadband Article which was published in issue 42, BT have now announced that they have scrapped the 'trigger levels' which were needed for Broadband to be enabled in rural towns and villages have been scrapped. In other words, there is no longer any need to register an interest in Broadband, as it will be made available in every Kent community over the next year anyway.

Partly as a result of pressure from the Kent County Council, BT have produced a schedule for enabling Broadband in each and every community, which does not currently have access to this high speed internet connection. According to this, Benenden and Iden Green are due to be 'Broadband enabled' in May 2005.

Autumn Walk:

A walk to ruins of Camber Castle has been proposed for the BACS Autumn Walk. This will take place on Sunday 3rd October at 2pm. More details will be made available in the Parish Magazine and the two local papers when this has been confirmed.

Amenity Refuse Collection:

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council organises the schedule for amenity refuse vehicle, which visits the Parish for three hours every fortnight, on a Saturday morning. For your information, the dates and venues of this service for the next three months, are printed below. The vehicle is accessible from 8am until 11am, and this is the same every fortnight.

July	August	September
Sat 3 rd – Iden Green crossroads Sat 17 th – Benenden Village Hall Sat 31 st – Iden Green crossroads	Sat 14 th – Cherryfields, Benenden Sat 28 th – Iden Green Crossroads	Sat 11 th – Benenden Village Hall Sat 25 th – Iden Green Crossroads

Your committee:

Full details of your committee are printed below. If you have any questions regarding subscriptions, please contact David Grief. If you have questions or concerns regarding planning matters, please contact Ernie Pollard. If you would like to comment on the 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.

<p>Alan Milne – Chairman Somers, Mounts Hill, Benenden, TN17 4ET Tel: 240819 Fax: 241109, Email: alanmilne@chartsec.co.uk</p> <p>Dick Hill – Treasurer Columbanus, Off Standen Street, Iden Green, TN17 4HR Tel: 240517, Email: dandmhill@lineone.net</p> <p>Angela Lloyd-Jones – Secretary West Winds, Cranbrook Road, Benenden, TN17 4EU Tel: 240354 Fax: 243064, Email: atljones75@hotmail.com</p> <p>David Grief – Membership Crit Hall, Cranbrook Road, Benenden, TN17 4EU Tel: 241772 Fax: 240772, Email: david@grief.co.uk</p>	<p>Ernie Pollard - Planning Springhill Farm, Standen Street, Iden Green, TN17 4LA Tel: 240674, Email: erniepoll@beeb.net</p> <p>Roger Lake Benenden Barn, The Street, Benenden, TN17 4BZ Tel: 241605</p> <p>Peter Blockley Clevelands, The Street, Benenden, TN17 4DB Tel: 240895</p> <p>William Davies - Publicity Weald House, Iden Green, TN17 4HH Tel/Fax: 240723, Email: wgd@wealdhouse.co.uk</p>
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The Benenden Steeple:

As most people will know, Benenden once possessed a remarkable detached timber steeple, about twenty feet from the body of the church at its north-west corner. Contemporary comments include *"The Steeple of this Church standeth off from the same and is of rare and remarkable workmanship in the inside therof"* (from Kilburne's *Survey of Kent*, 1659), *"For beauty the second in the realm"* and *"...a serviceable sea mark from Hyth to Dungeness Point"*. Benenden is some eighteen miles from that stretch of coast. It must have been a remarkable structure.

The 17th Churchwardens' accounts for Benenden are generally concerned with matters such as *"Item to James Turner for one days work in diking in ye churchyard, 1s 2d"* and *"Item payd to severall p-sons for foxes heads, grays heads & crows, magpyes & other vermines 16s 4d"*, and with the regular collection of the church rates from the property owners in the parish.

Abruptly, at the end of 1672, the accounts are interrupted by a page of dramatic writing, beginning –

"Munday the 30th day of December 1672 between Twelve and one in the morning Arose a storm of Lightning and thunder, a hard gale of wind, some raine out of the South west, which set fire to the steeple at Benenden whereby the said Steeple with the Roof and all the Timber worke of the Church was Consumed in 4 or 5 howers time; the five large bells melted; also five houses ajoyning the Churchyard Gate on the north side burnt to the Ground; the Steeple was built all of timber"

It continues with a description of the structure of the timber steeple. We do not know who wrote this, but clearly it was intended as a record for future generations.

In the course of time, the churchwardens' accounts were lost. Some Victorian antiquarians knew of reports of a great detached steeple at Benenden, but dismissed them, suggesting that Kilburne's description was intended for the much more modest detached timber steeple at Brookland, even though Kilburne lived in Hawkhurst. Then in 1896, the Churchwardens' Accounts were rediscovered and the historical reality of the detached steeple was accepted (article in *Archeologia Cantiana*, 1897).

A local timber steeple which has survived is at High Halden. Although this is attached to the church, it has strong structural similarities to Benenden's (so experts tell me). The High Halden steeple is very much smaller, about 70 feet high compared with Benenden's estimated 132 feet. The surviving detached steeple at Brookland, of a very different structure, is about 75 feet high.

The written description of the steeple is sufficiently detailed for reconstructive drawing. This has now been done by Jill Atherton, who has previously made superb architectural drawings (including reconstructions) for great buildings such as Chichester Cathedral and Westminster Abbey. We will feature the Benenden steeple drawing at the Benenden week exhibit at Cranbrook museum in October. In a sense it is a tribute to the Benenden man who described the building while it was fresh in his memory.

Ernie Pollard