

# BACS

## Newsletter September 2007 No. 56

*Benenden Amenity and Countryside Society*

### Dates for your Diary:

Autumn Walk – Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> September, 2.30pm  
Tenterden Museum Event – Monday 8<sup>th</sup> October, 8pm  
AGM – Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> March 2008, 7.30pm

### Tenterden Museum:

The BACS committee has organised a visit to the Tenterden museum, to take place on Monday 8<sup>th</sup> October, beginning at 8pm.

Tenterden or Tenet-wara-den (the pasture of the men of Thanet) as it used to be known, is bursting with history. The museum is housed in a two storey weather boarded building in station road and covers more than 1000 years of local history with exhibits celebrating hop picking, farming, the Cinque Ports, the Weald and Victorian domestic life. The museum curator will ensure that any maps, photos and stories relating to Benenden are also on display for this special event.

Tickets are £3 a head for members and £5 for non-members, and will be allocated on a first paid first served basis. Please contact Alan Milne for tickets and make cheques payable to BACS. Numbers are strictly limited to 20, so please book early if you would like to attend. Refreshments will be served.

### Autumn Walk:

This year's Autumn walk is on Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> September and will be a circular walk of about 5 miles, around Lamberhurst, Kilndown and Scotney Castle. Dogs on a lead will be welcome. We will set off at 2.30pm from Lamberhurst Car Park, where there will also be light refreshments at the end of the walk. Please contact Alan Milne for further information.

### 2008 Events:

The 2008 AGM will be in the Benenden Village Hall on Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> March, beginning at 7.30pm. After the formal part of the meeting, Ernie Pollard will talk to members about history of the Benenden Spire.

Also planned for 2008 is an organised event at the Union Windmill in Cranbrook. Please keep an eye on future newsletters for more details.

### Planning Matters:

The Committee continues to look at planning applications for the benefit of all in Benenden. Natalie Blakemore is responsible for monitoring all planning applications, which are then discussed at BACS committee meetings.

A summary of planning applications can be found on the Parish noticeboard in the village centre, and details can be found on-line at [www.tunbridgewells.gov.uk](http://www.tunbridgewells.gov.uk). Alternatively, planning applications may be viewed at the Town Hall in Tunbridge Wells or at the Weald Information Centre in Cranbrook. Please contact the Borough Council on 01892 526121 or [info@tunbridgewells.gov.uk](mailto:info@tunbridgewells.gov.uk) for further information.

If you have any concerns about a planning application near you, please contact a committee member who will be able to raise your concerns at the next committee meeting.

### Subscriptions:

The subscription for 2007 is £3 for an individual or £5 for a family. Alternatively, you can pay £50 for life 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.

### 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.

September	October	November
Sat 22 <sup>nd</sup> – Iden Green Crossroads	Sat 6 <sup>th</sup> – Benenden Village Hall Sat 20 <sup>th</sup> – Iden Green Crossroads	Sat 3 <sup>rd</sup> – Cherryfields, Benenden Sat 17 <sup>th</sup> – Iden Green Crossroads

### Your committee:

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#### David Grief – Membership

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## **The Benenden Interview:**

As a complete change to the series of home guard articles printed last year, below is the first of several interviews with parishioners who have stories of the village to tell and memories to share.

This month Gill Snow talked to Miriam and Philip Message about the history of the village and Baldwin's Store. We are extremely grateful to Gill for conducting the interview and writing the article.

It is hoped this new series will be popular with all members, bringing back fantastic memories for some, and providing a fascinating insight into the past for others. Please do contact Gill Snow, or any other committee member, if you have any comments or suggestions for future interviews.

## **Barbers and Birds - all part of the Baldwin's Store Story**

Benenden village green boasts one of the classic village scenes in Kent with its cricket pitch flanked on three sides by the church, the pub and the old school house. There has been a shop on the site of Baldwin's General Store, overlooking this timeless scene, for around 150 years. Pictures of the Benenden cricket team, playing in 1870 clearly show a shop already established in its premises which date back to the 16th century. Its present owners, Phillip and Miriam Message, have run the shop together for 49 years, taking over from Miriam's dad who had been the village barber since 1914. Alongside cutting hair and running the shop, he also repaired motorcycles, and during the war sold whatever he could from seeds to bicycle spares and sweets.

Miriam Message was born in the house and has lived there all her life. As long-time residents of Benenden, Phillip and Miriam have seen many changes although as Phillip says, "we haven't changed as much as some villages". What has changed according to the couple is that more people leave the village to work and to shop. When Miriam was a child growing up in the 1940s there was no need for villagers to leave Benenden as everything was on their doorstep. "Everybody walked past everyday with their shopping baskets and went in and out of the shops, they just didn't think of getting in a car..."

As well as Baldwin's Store the village had a post office, a sweet shop, Fuggles Garage, Wards the butchers and a general store called Rollings, on the site of what is now the village shop. Rollings had a bake house at the back, and a haberdashery department with a long oak counter. It sold everything from fresh produce and milk to the paraffin that people used for lighting and cooking in the outlying farms with no electricity.

Nowadays Benenden is lucky to still have three shops and two pubs, more than many other local villages. Miriam can remember when Iden Green supported a butcher, baker, post office and general store as well as two pubs. Phillip and Miriam both blame the demise of the small shop on the large supermarkets, especially now villagers are ferried to the stores on free buses. They don't blame the people using the shops, as Phillip says, "the whole pattern of shopping has changed". The rise in farm shops and farmers markets has also affected business as there are now more outlets for fresh local produce.

During the war Miriam helped out her parents in their shop and vividly remembers snipping sweet coupons so local children could get their sweet rations. The war brought changes to the village with Benenden School being evacuated to Cornwall while some evacuees were billeted in the village. Miriam remembers having lessons in the air raid shelters that were built at the village school, and saw the famous Spitfire crash at Iden Green. She also remembers the freedom she and other local children enjoyed when they roamed the countryside playing outside for hours on end and picking primroses, which were tied in bunches and sold in local towns.

During the 1930s and 40s the village played host to hop pickers from London who came on the train to the station at Gills Green and were then transported to the hop gardens by tractor and trailer. Pickers lived in the hoppers huts and the village was surrounded by hop farms, all of which have now gone. The hop pickers would come into the village for supplies and the local shopkeepers would have to keep a close eye on their stock, remembers Miriam. At Wards the butchers the bottom part of the stable door was shut and the pickers would queue outside for their meat.

Local children all attended the village school and then, as now, the green was used for games. In those days the village school kept children until the age of 14 unless, like Miriam, they passed the 'scholarship' and travelled by bus into Maidstone, Ashford or Tonbridge. Unlike now there was plenty of work in the village, local lads would work on the many farms or in the building trade and a large local employer was the nursery at Dingledean.

When Phillip and Miriam married in 1958 they took over Baldwins and turned it into a general store. Over the years they have sold a host of different things. In the 1960s they kept free-range chickens in the fields where Harmsworth Court now stands and grew their own produce to sell in the shop. Phillip also repairs bicycles and at one time the girls from Benenden School would queue up to get their punctures mended and brakes fixed. Phillip and Miriam agree that it was Princess Anne coming to the school that really put the village on the map and she, like the other girls, would crowd into the store to buy sweetie supplies. The Queen Mother also visited the village in the 1940s, when she was Queen, and was introduced to Miriam's father who served as a wartime ambulance driver.

Nowadays Phillip and Miriam are semi-retired but Baldwin's still opens on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays and Phillip still repairs bicycles and sharpens knives. Meanwhile, part of the shop is now home to a small gallery of Stephen Message's artwork. Stephen, Philip and Miriam's youngest son, still lives in the village and is a world renowned artist whose beautifully accurate pictures of birds have appeared in books, calendars and magazines as well as in collections in Europe, America, Australia and South Africa. Each year, on the last Saturday in October Stephen holds an exhibition of his work in the Memorial Hall and earlier this year BACS members were lucky enough to have him as a guide for our 'Dawn Chorus' walk in Parsonage Wood.

Stephen's love of wildlife and the countryside undoubtedly comes from his dad Phillip. After coming to the village from neighbouring Sussex in 1958, Phillip has immersed himself in Village life serving as a Parish councillor for 16 years, retiring last year. During his time on the council Phillip took on the task of overseeing footpaths in the Parish, a job he still enjoys. As a farmer's boy Phillip relishes the chance this gives him to get out into the countryside and he regularly walks on the 66 footpaths, which stretch for 26 miles around the Parish. He keeps an eye on what needs doing to the footpaths and in his time as footpath representative he has installed no less than 80 stiles, making it possible for all of us to enjoy the countryside.

Phillip also leads the very popular BACS walks, choosing the routes and walking them in advance to make sure they are suitable. This year's BACS Autumn walk will take place on September 23rd and will be in the beautiful countryside around Lamberhurst, Kilndown and Scotney Castle.