

BACS

Newsletter June 2008 No. 58

Benenden Amenity and Countryside Society

Dates for your Diary:

Early Summer Walk – Sunday 8th June
Union Windmill Tour – Monday 22nd September

Early Summer Walk:

This year's summer walk is on Sunday 8th June and will be a circular walk around Ashburnham place, beginning at 2.30pm. The walk is about 5 miles long and no dogs are allowed. Ashburnham Place has magnificent gardens designed by Capability Brown, and those who prefer not to walk are invited to explore the gardens. The grounds extend to 220 acres.

We meet in the car park at Ashburnham Place, about 4 miles west of Battle on the A271 in the direction of Bexhill. It is about 200 yards after a sharp bend, on the right. For those using a route-finder or satnav, you may like to know the post code is TN33 9NF, and should take about 40 minutes to drive from Benenden. Entrance to the gardens is £3.00 per person. No charge for cars.

Please contact Alan Milne for further information.

Dawn Chorus Walk:

The BACS committee would like to thank Stephen Message, who led a fascinating and instructive Dawn Chorus Walk, round the grounds and woodlands of Sissinghurst Castle. The event was oversubscribed, leaving some members disappointed, but it is hoped this can become a regular annual event.

Electronic BACS:

As you may know, BACS has its own area on the Benenden village website, which can be found at www.benendenvillage.org.uk. On this site, you can discover the origins and objectives of the society, you can read about upcoming events, and you can print a membership form, which can be used to either join the society or renew your membership. It is also possible to download back issues of the newsletter, from issue 37 onwards.

It is now also possible to receive this newsletter by email, which would be delivered as a 'pdf' document. If you would prefer to receive your newsletter in this way, please contact William Davies or any other committee member.

Remember, by choosing this option, you'll be saving the society money by lowering the costs of printing and postage. You will also be helping the environment!

AGM Report:

The 20th Annual General Meeting of the Benenden Amenity and Countryside Society took place on Thursday 13th March in the Benenden Village Hall. The meeting began with Alan Milne presenting his chairman's report, after which Dick Hill presented the treasurer's report. Alan Milne was then re-elected as chairman, Angela Lloyd-Jones was re-elected as secretary and Dick Hill was re-elected as treasurer. The remaining committee members were then also re-elected to serve on the committee for another year.

The chairman's report in full follows at the end of this newsletter.

This year's guest speaker was Ernie Pollard, former committee member and local historian. Following the formal part of the meeting, Ernie gave a fascinating presentation on the Benenden Steeple, a famous landmark which dramatically burned down in 1672. The Steeple was a bell tower detached from the church, about 16 to 20 feet to the North West. It had stone foundations and a wooden spire, about 132 feet high.

The first known reference to the Steeple can be found in Kilburnes 'Survey of Kent' (1659), which referred to the structure as "*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.

Ernie also spoke about the Churchwardens' accounts for Benenden, which were generally concerned with matters relating to parish income and expenditure. Campanologists may be interested to know there is a reference to 14 shillings spent on a church bell: "*The great bell being fallen down: To remove it and secure it from further damage.*"

However, 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*"

The loss of this great Steeple irrevocably changed the village, but members may be interested to know that similar bell towers do still exist in the area, including a timber steeple at High Halden. Although this is attached to the church, it has strong structural similarities to Benenden's. 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 talk was thoroughly enjoyed by all and Ernie Pollard was thanked for his interesting and informative talk.

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. 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 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 2008 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.

June	July	August
Sat 14 th – Cherryfields, Benenden Sat 28 th – Iden Green Crossroads	Sat 12 th – Benenden Village Hall Sat 26 th – Iden Green Crossroads	Sat 9 th – Cherryfields, Benenden Sat 23 rd – Iden Green Crossroads

Your committee:

<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</p> <p>Angela Lloyd-Jones – Secretary West Winds, Cranbrook Road, Benenden, TN17 4EU Tel: 240354 Fax: 243064, Email: angela136@btinternet.com</p> <p>David Grief – Membership Crit Hall, Cranbrook Road, Benenden, TN17 4EU Tel: 241772 Fax: 240772, Email: david@grief.co.uk</p>	<p>Natalie Blakemore – Planning 2 Hortons Close, Benenden, TN17 4LF Tel: 243118, Email: nattib@tiscali.co.uk</p> <p>Roger Lake – Parish Council Rep. Benenden Barn, The Street, Benenden, TN17 4BZ Tel: 241605</p> <p>Gill Snow - Publicity Orchards, Mounts Hill, Benenden, TN17 4ET Tel: 240493, Email: grsnow@hotmail.co.uk</p> <p>William Davies - Newsletter Weald House, Iden Green, TN17 4HH Tel/Fax: 240723, Email: wgd@wealdhouse.co.uk</p>
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BACS CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 20TH AGM – 13 MARCH 2008

This is the 20th anniversary of the foundation of BACS by a group from Benenden who wanted to protect the specialness of the village and Iden Green. It was started under the chairmanship of Jonathan Strong.

Since then your Society has ensured that it kept to its founding objects. However, we have recently come across a copy of the Constitution and realised that one or two things have changed in the running of the Society over time – primarily the year end has changed and the subscriptions have gone up a little. We also realise that we are not nor never have been a charity and that with funds of just over £2,000 we are hardly likely to become property owners.

Therefore, we have taken this opportunity of presenting you with a revised constitution for your consideration this evening and hope that you will support your Committee by adopting it. The proposed constitution was circulated with the notice of AGM and there are a few copies of it and the existing constitution in the room.

However, the constitution did draw our minds to the fact that we can appoint vice-presidents. We have thought about this and thought that we would like to appoint 3 people in the village who have given strong support to BACS over the years. We would like to recommend that Jonathan Strong (our first chairman), Ernie Pollard (who has given us so much support and encouragement over the years), and Philip Message (who has arranged most of our walks in recent years) should be specially honoured and I hope that you will support their appointment later in the meeting. I can assure you that this is not in lieu of a fee for Ernie, who is talking to us after the formal part of the meeting is over.

Can I welcome all newcomers and new members here this evening? A special welcome goes to Charles Hill, our new vicar, and his wife, Joanne. We look forward to seeing them at our various meetings.

We continue to organise 2 walks during the year and a visit to a local museum or other place of interest. Last year we also started a dawn chorus, when Stephen Message took a few of us round Parsonage Wood and the nearby lanes to listen to birds waking up. This was finished off with a garden breakfast.

We are organising the next dawn chorus which leaves the car park of Sissinghurst Castle at 4.45am on Sunday 18 May. Stephen Message is again leading us and, as numbers are very limited, only those who have pre-booked can be accommodated. Booking forms are on the table: please write your name and telephone number clearly. Breakfast will follow the walk. Of course, no dogs are allowed for this event.

During last year we organised a private visit to Tenterden Museum where the curator put on a special display of maps and photos covering Benenden. It was a good social evening, and this year we hope to accommodate more members at another special evening, this time at the Union Mill, Cranbrook on Monday, 22 September, where we shall be shown around the mill and also shall be organising there a social evening.

Two walks were held last year - around Goudhurst, and Scotney Castle and Kilndown. There will be another 2 during this year and we usually arrange to incorporate a shorter walk for those who feel that they would prefer not to take the longer one. Again, Philip Message does all the pre-walking and planning and his next suggestion is from Ashburnham Place near Battle on Sunday 8 June. Details will come out in the next newsletter. We welcome members and friends to these Sunday afternoon walks and supply maps and walking notes. We also keep copies for those who cannot make a walk or who want to go over old ground. Please let me know if you would like any copies.

The Strawberry Culvert scheme seems to have ground to a halt. We have been asked to act as agent for the project and filled out a huge bundle of bureaucratic forms six months ago: all has since gone dead and quiet.

However, a project which has been very active is the renovation or replacement of 18 footpath stiles or gates in the Parish. Kent County Council gave us a donation of £2,500 for the work, and I would like to thank our Kent County Councillor, Roger Manning, for suggesting that we would be worthy of such a grant, and Philip Message for identifying the work to be carried out.

We always welcome new members and you can get contact details of all the committee from our quarterly newsletter and details of future events, or by visiting www.benendenvillage.org.uk where we also put previous copies of our newsletter online.

I'd like to thank all of our members for their interest in BACS and give a special thanks to all of the Committee and to our honorary auditor, Fred Bishop.

We now move to the formal part of the meeting, after which Ernie Pollard will talk about a fascinating and important part of our village history, and then we can further relax over a glass of wine and something to eat.

Thank you for coming along this evening.