

B.A.C.S. NEWSLETTER
July 2002
No. XXXVI11

Dates for your Diary:

Autumn Walk on Sunday September 15th at 2pm at Iden Green Pavilion.
A.G..M. Wednesday February 5th 2003 at 7.30 pm at the Village Hall

Autumn Walk

We are very lucky to enjoy the local knowlege of Philip Message, who will lead the walk this time.

We will meet at the Iden Green Pavilion at 2 pm. Please bring contributions of sandwiches, cakes, biscuits, scones etc, which we will share together with tea after the walk(about 4pm). We will walk a circuit that is possible to be shortened for some of our less strenuous friends. All members, friends, family and dogs on leads are welcome.

Planning Matters.

We have sent a letter to the Planning Services department of the Borough Council, to highlight a general concern, as follows;

“The committee of the Benenden Countryside and Amenity Society has, from time to time, commented on individual planning applications for Benenden. One pattern emerging from the applications gives us a more general concern. This is the continual pressure for development along the Benenden to Cranbrook road, recently at Apple Pye, Hams, Hartleys and the small area of Hemsted Park taken in to a garden. So far, we are pleased to say, these pressures have been largely resisted. We would like to give our strong support to continued resistance. There is a real danger that the rural character of this stretch of road could be lost, and the traffic problem made even worse, by expanding industrial and domestic development, out of character with the High Weald AONB.”

In addition to the Built Landscape, the small woods, hedges, ponds and other countryside features are of course crucial to the beauty of the parish. We would like to encourage local landowners to retain and enhance such features wherever possible. Some are protected by law and we are working to improve our own understanding of the legislation and other ways in which we can play a role in helping to conserve the landscape.

If you have any planning concerns, please contact Ernie Pollard as below, or our Chairman Alan Milne, on 01580 240255, or E-mail alanmilne@chartsec.co.uk

Subscriptions.

Couple and family membership remains at £5, single membership at £2. If you no longer wish to be a member please do let us know so that we can stop posting your newsletter and hassling you for money!

At present we have over 130 members, some of whom have still not yet paid for this year! Please pay your area rep. as soon as you can.

Two members are stepping down from the committee, and we thank Peter Nuttall and Murray Clayson for their help and support over the last few years. The new area reps are therefore as follows;

Area 1; Benenden West and Cranbrook Road (East of Cheeseman's Garage);

Lizanne Brown, Lower Standen Farm, Benenden, Kent. TN17 4LA. Tel;240193

Area 2; The Green and The Street;

David Grief, Crit Hall, Cranbrook Road, Benenden, Kent. TN17 4EU. Tel 240609

Area 3; Walkhurst Road and Goddard's Green;

Alan Milne, Somers, Mount Hill, Cranbrook Road, Benenden, Kent. TN17 4ES. Tel 240819.

Area 4; Hemsted, New Pond Road and Mount Le Hoe;

Trish Evans, White Stables, Rolvenden Road, Benenden, Kent. TN17 4EH

Tel; 240527. E-mail; trish.evans@ukonline.co.uk

Area 5; Scullsgate, Nineveh and Cranbrook Road West ; (and temporarily)

Area 6; Pullington and Dingledean;

Diana Gabriel, Highfield House, Rolvenden Road, Benenden, Kent. TN17 4EH Tel;

240255. E-mail; gabriel@rya-online.net

Area 7; Standen Street and Iden Green;

Ernie Pollard, Springhill Farm, Standen Street, Benenden, Kent. TN17 4LA

Tel; 240674. E-mail; epollard@springhillfarm.demon.co.uk

New members are always welcome, so please tell old friends and new about the Society, and tell us if there is someone whom you think might like a letter of introduction and a newsletter.

If any of you would be happy to receive your newsletter by e-mail, please inform our accountant, Diana Gabriel on gabriel@rya-online.net

As we said in the previous newsletter, we hope to include an article on the local countryside in each newsletter. We are again grateful to Ernie Pollard who has written the third in a series of guided walks in the Benenden area. This time I just did have time to illustrate it! If anyone has ideas for further contributions, please contact one of the committee. Comments would be welcome on this the third of our Parish Trails - is it too long, too short, inaccurate in any way? Do you enjoy reading them? Do you actually 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.

Lizanne Brown July 2002

Parish Trail 3. **Hemsted and The Ford**

A walk of about an hour and a quarter, setting off from Benenden Crossroads (Grid Reference 8063300) westwards towards Cranbrook. The Old Manor House is immediately on the right. Outside its wall is a well commemorating Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee, given to the village by Lord Cranbrook of Hemsted House. The well is on the site of an earlier toll house, perhaps used for both of the turnpike roads which intersected here.

The Old Manor House is probably the oldest house in the parish and was the manor house of Benenden Manor. It is still partially surrounded by its moat. The oldest part of the house, the wing aligned east-west, dates from about 1390 and includes a large central hall. In the 19th and early 20th centuries the house was occupied by several families. Most of the land of Benenden Manor lay to the east of the house and included the village centre, the Green and the church.

Occasional large oaks on banks either side of the road show its former width, perhaps here narrowing from an area of common land along The Street (see Village Trail). The houses either side are mostly 20th century, built as the village has become more prosperous. Turn right along the drive of Benenden School into Hemsted Park, along footpath **WC119** on the High Weald Landscape Trail. The lodge house at the end of the drive was designed by the architect George Devey (see trail 5 – Village Trail) for Lord Cranbrook in the late 19th century.

Turn left, still on footpath **WC119**, soon after entering the park. The imposing Hemsted House on the right has been occupied by Benenden School since 1924. The present house dates from about 1860, with major alterations in 1912. The first house was probably a hall house resembling the Old Manor House and was the manor house of Hemsted Manor. The Guldeford family built the first large house in the 1400s and created a hunting park to the north-west of the house. The Guldefords also owned Halden Place in Rolvenden, where there was once another large park.

The Guldefords helped Henry VII, the first of the Tudors, to gain the throne, and they occupied high office for some 200 years. Queen Elizabeth visited Thomas Guldeford here in 1573 and he was knighted by her. The family became Catholics shortly afterwards and their days of influence were over. Eventually, in the early 1700s they were forced to sell Hemsted. The next owner, Admiral John Norris, created today's park to the south of the house and enclosed the old park of the Guldefords. The new park was created from hedged fields and perhaps a few of the oaks survive from this ancient landscape. The next owners, the Hodges, demolished the wings of the Tudor house, including a tower rather like that at Sissinghurst, and Lord Cranbrook completed its demolition and built the present house in 1859-62.

Just before we reach a pond to the left of the path, notice a raised ridge, running north-south, marking an old road from Hemsted House to Parsonage Farm. This is mistakenly marked as a Roman Road on Ordnance Survey maps; the exact line of the Roman road is uncertain but is to the west of this road. Shortly beyond the huge sweet chestnut tree, turn left on footpath **WC315**, heading for the corner of the park on the Cranbrook Road. The chestnut is said (as are many others!) to have been planted to mark the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, but is probably too young; it has been aged at about 375 years, taking it back to the 1620s. In spring its many hollows are used by nesting jackdaws.

At the entrance to the park are banks, forming a roughly circular enclosure, where a substantial house once stood. Leaving the park, we are in a lane which was a major route north out of the parish before the New Pond Road turnpike was built. The lane was known as Simmonden Lane and Crabtree Lane at different times and a 1777 map marks it "To London"! Simmonden was one of the old dens, or woodland pastures for swine (Trail 1), and spanned the Benenden/ Cranbrook parish boundary; Crabtree is still the name of a farm close by.

Return towards Benenden village on the road and turn south (right) along footpath **WC312A** at Corner Cottages, just beyond Parsonage Farm. This farm once belonged to Combwell Priory in Goudhurst, to which the Benenden parish church belonged. There is said to have been a large tithe barn here. The first

part of the footpath is on the line of the Roman Road, from north Kent to Hastings. It was used primarily to carry iron out of the Weald and is surfaced in places (well below ground level) with slag from the iron furnaces. The track continues downhill at the side of the Roman Road which has become a hollow way, sunk sometimes far below the footpath. There are old coppice stools and hornbeam pollards on the banks of the road, with some rarer trees, such as wild service and crab-apple (both near the first hedge at right angles to the route), and a ground flora of woodland herbs.

Continue down to the stream near Stream Farm. Here there was a ford, made of stones of Bethersden Marble. A photograph from the 1930s shows many still in position, but only a very few remain now, scattered haphazardly around. The ford is reputedly of Roman origin, although direct evidence seems to be lacking. Also here is a hundred stone at the boundary of Cranbrook, Rolvenden and Selbritten hundreds, ancient divisions of the county. It cannot be coincidence that the two places in the parish where three hundreds meet are both on Roman Roads (see trail 1, Church Wood).

Turn east (left) at the ford on footpath **WC320** along an old green lane. The hedge alongside is a rich one, with a wide variety of woody species, including yew, and violets, primroses and other attractive flowers in the bank. On the left, just short of the road, is a small stone quarry where sandstone from the Ashdown Beds was dug. The presence of broom here shows that the soil is very acid. As we emerge on to the road, we get a view of the church tower ahead; imagine the spectacular old timber steeple, almost twice the height of the tower destroyed by fire in 1672.

Turn left and walk back to the cross-roads. On the left is Stonequarry Wood in its deep gill (valley). In the nineteenth century rough stone, from pits here, was used to resurface the parish roads. The elm-like trees just opposite the entrance to Collingwood Grange are *keaki*, a Japanese species which must have been planted by Collingwood Ingram (see 5. Village trail) and there are some other “unexpected” trees in the area which probably have the same origin.