

**B.A.C.S. NEWSLETTER**  
**January 2003**  
**No. XXX1X**

Dates for your Diary:

A.G..M. Wednesday February 12<sup>th</sup> at 7.30 pm in the Village Hall.  
Spring Walk on Sunday, April 25<sup>th</sup>, at 2pm.  
Clean up Benenden day, t.b.a at the end of March.

A.G..M.

Please note that this has been changed from the original date, so do make sure you have the right one in your diaries. After the AGM, (which is always short and sweet by popular demand), we are pleased to welcome John Stafford, Forest Officer from the Forestry Commission, who will talk to us about Hemsted Forest. He will cover aspects of its recent history, management, public access, and wildlife, so it should be interesting for many members who enjoy the forest. We thank him for his time and knowledge. Mulled wine and nibbles will be served afterwards.

Spring Walk

The venue for the Spring walk is still to be confirmed, so please look out for notices in the Parish Mag, local papers, and the notice board at the village shop, for details nearer the time.

Clean up Benenden Day

This will be arranged as soon as the rota for the rubbish lorry is known, probably at the end of March. Please check the notice board nearer the time. All help on this day is very welcome, from little people to older ones, so please come along if you can.

Subscriptions.

We have decided after discussion that we will discontinue the idea of 'area reps', as we sadly no longer all walk round our areas delivering letters by hand as we used to do. Instead David Grief has offered his services as a Membership Secretary, and he will therefore be responsible for all new members, and for collating subscriptions. Please pay your subs for 2003 and send them to him at the address below. If you have subs outstanding from 2002 (which still applies to ten families), please send these also, and make it clear that you have paid for both.

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 100 members, as fifteen families have had to be deleted from the membership for non-payment for 2001 and 2002.

Planning Matters.

The planning application for a bungalow at Hartley's has gone to appeal. Objections or support need to be submitted in 3 copies, and received by Feb.21<sup>st</sup>, by the Planning Inspectorate, Kite Wing, Temple Quay House, 2, The Square, Temple Quay, Bristol, BSI 6PN, quoting ref; APP/M2270/A/02/1106144.

The application for the manager's house at Ham's Travel, to which the Society objected, has been turned down.

Permission has been given for the Orange telecommunications mast in Hemsted Forest, as this was felt to be the least objectionable of all the suggested sites.

If you have any planning concerns, please contact Ernie Pollard, or our Chairman Alan Milne; addresses as below.

### The Committee.

Committee members are as follows;

Chairman; Alan Milne, Somers, Mount Hill, Cranbrook Road, Benenden,  
Kent. TN17 4ES. Tel 240819. or E-mail [alanmilne@chartsec.co.uk](mailto:alanmilne@chartsec.co.uk)

Treasurer; Diana Gabriel, Highfield House, Rolvenden Road, Benenden,  
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Secretary; Angela Lloyd-Jones, West Winds, Cranbrook Road, Benenden,  
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Membership Secretary; David Grief, Crit Hall, Cranbrook Road, Benenden,  
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Planning issues; Ernie Pollard, Springhill Farm, Standen Street, Benenden,  
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Kent. TN17 4LA. Tel; 240193

Carol Varley, White Lodge, Cranbrook Road, Benenden,  
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Gordon Reynolds, Forest Farm, Nineveh Lane, Benenden. Tel 240479

William Davies; Weald House, Iden Green, Benenden, Kent. TN17 4CY. Tel 240723

We would like to welcome William Davies to the committee. He works for the K.C.C, and is the local reporter for the Kent Messenger. He will surely be a very useful addition to our number, as well as reducing the average age considerably!

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 new introductory pack and a newsletter. 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. If anyone has ideas for further contributions, please contact one of the committee.

Comments would be welcome on this the fourth 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.

## Stepneyford Lane. East End and “The Pump”

A walk of about 2 hours, partly on roads and partly on footpaths. Start on Stepneyford Lane near Maplesden (Grid Reference 834333) and walk northwards downhill. In this area dogwood is common in the hedges, although relatively scarce elsewhere in the parish; the autumn leaves often turn a dark plum colour. There are some alder trees on the right; usually a streamside tree but here on a hillside, and also sycamore, an introduced species from continental Europe. The commonest hedgerow shrubs during much of the walk are hornbeam and hazel, which are characteristic of our rich old woods and hedges over much of the Weald.

Cross Stepneyford bridge; a stone marking the boundary between Rolvenden and Barklay hundreds stood on the far bank of the stream to the west of the road. The stone was accidentally broken by farm machinery within the last twenty years. Next on the left is the old road from Walkhurst Bridge (Trail 3). Immediately to the north of this road, in the angle with Stepneyford Lane is an area of farm and woodland formerly known as East Walkhurst, far detached from Walkhurst itself and once linked to it by the road. Like Great and Little Walkhurst, East Walkhurst was owned by Canterbury Cathedral until the nineteenth century.

Climb the hill alongside Backtilt wood, part of the old den of Bagtilt. The dens were originally woodland pastures for pigs (see Trail 1) and the den of Bagtilt was owned by Dover Priory. The wood has a wide variety of trees but much is chestnut coppice, probably planted in the nineteenth century for hop poles. In the lowest part of the wood there is a large pit can be seen. This is marked as a quarry on the first Ordnance Survey maps of 1870; we know from parish records that stone from “Backtilt” was used for road repairs in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the stone may have come from here. In 1801 Backtilt wood was divided into Lower and Upper Backtilt, both adjoining the lane, with a field between them; thus the tree growth of the central area of today’s wood is fairly recent.

We cross from the Wadhurst Clay, where the road is deeply sunken between high banks, to the Tunbridge Wells Sand where it is much less so. The sunken roads of the Weald are the result of years of erosion by horse-drawn traffic in winter quagmires; roads on better draining soils are less susceptible to erosion than those on heavy clay. Climbing further, notice the silver-barked beech trees at the edge of the wood; almost all have several trunks, suggesting that they were coppiced or layered before being allowed to grow tall. The (private) road to the west at the upper end of the wood was “stopped” in 1859, presumably to save money, at the same time as that from Walkhurst Bridge to Stepneyford Lane.

Continue up the lane and turn right into Halden Lane at a junction with a triangle of scrub at its centre (there is a seat on the far side, should you be tired already !). This lane leads on to Halden Place in Rolvenden, where the Guldefords family of Hemsted had another house and park; turn first left, after about 200 yards. In the hedges, as we drop down towards the stream, hops scramble though the hazel and hornbeam. Hops are native to Britain, but whether these are the native species or varieties introduced for cultivation I do not know. Hops were once grown on virtually every farm in the parish, but for the last decade or so there have been none.

Cross the stream, which rises from springs at the junction of the sands and the clays not far to the west. It flows east to the Newmill Channel and then south to the Rother. The bridge here was known in the 1600s as *Pepper Mill Bridge* and an early paper mill stood some two hundred yards east along the stream. Mounds close to the bridge suggest either an earlier bridge on a slightly different line or possibly a dam holding water for the mill. A small yew tree stands by the larger mound. *The Atlas of Kent Flora* suggests that the yew is native in Kent only on the chalk and elsewhere it owes its presence to seeds dispersed by birds from churchyard and other planted trees. The many yew place-names in the weald, such as Iden Green in Benenden and Ewhurst, together with its very wide if sparse distribution, strongly suggest that the yew is a true native of the Weald. As we climb the hill beyond the stream, look out for another local tree, a small but fairly old wild service (or chequer) tree high on the bank beyond Bexhill Cottage on the same side of the road.

Take footpath **WC343** to the left (north-west) just beyond Bexhill Nursery. The path runs to the north of the old house with the wonderful name of Frogs’ Hole. Walk by the side of hedges and a deep ditch and then across a field to join Goddards Green road close to the conspicuous blue hospital sign, a useful if

intrusive marker. Turn left (west) along the road. We are now in East End, the name probably a survival from the division of the parish into quarters for rate collection from at least the 1600s. We are on the broad Goddards Green Road, along which drovers from the east of Kent brought their pigs into the Weald.

The hospital began as a Tuberculosis sanatorium in 1905/6, when the Cleveland Farm estate was bought, and since then has had a long association with the Civil Service. The hospital has diversified, grown enormously, and is now a major employer in the area. Even in these modern grounds a few ancient features have survived. For example, some of the tidy trimmed hedges within the hospital area contain a variety of woody species, revealing their ancient origin and at least one line of mature oaks marks the line of a former field boundary.

If you have visited Great Dixter in Northiam, you may have seen the old Benenden house attached to the main house there, it was moved piecemeal from Benenden in 1910. It came from East End and was known as *The Old House at Home*. I think that it stood on Goddards Green Road at the far (west) side of Mockbeggar Lane, where in 1777 there was a small farm known as *Further Home Farm*.

Soon on the left is a high mound where an early windmill stood. It had gone by 1777, although the name Windmill Hill, with Millbank House and Orchard, survived until then. St Margaret's Church on the right, behind which an old road (footpath) leads into Hemsted Forest, was built by Lord Cranbrook at the time of his Golden Wedding in 1888. The interior was refurnished, using local oak, in 1959. The many carvings include the symbol of the Inland Revenue Branch of the Civil Service, the moneybags and sword of St Matthew the tax gatherer. Lord Cranbrook's gift included the old schoolroom and adjoining house for the teacher. The hospital now cares for this little church and bears the costs of maintenance.

Leaving the Hospital behind, we walk along the edge of Uppergate Wood, which lies on the south (left) of the road. The name (meaning upper street) may refer to Goddards Green Road or, just possibly, to the Roman road that ran close to the southern edge of the wood. There is a record of oak bark, for tanning, taken from this wood in around 1540. Parts of the wood, like many others locally, have been planted with chestnut coppice and some has been cut recently.

Turn left beyond Uppergate Wood, along a quiet lane. The lane is a continuation of that we passed at the top of Backtilt Wood and was no doubt part of the Guldeford's route between their houses at Hemsted and Halden Place. Look on the right hand verge for a boundary stone marking the junction of Rolvenden and Barkley hundreds, ancient administrative units which go back to before Domesday. The boundary ran along the road from the direction of Backtilt and then turned west at the marker stone into the adjoining field towards Goddards Green. We turn right (west) along the drive towards Pympe Manor (historically Pump Farm or The Pump) one of the fine medieval houses of the parish. The footpath **WC344A** leads us to the left, skirting around the barn.

The Pump was a clothier's house in the sixteenth century and this history was preserved in field names until at least the mid nineteenth century. As we pass over the second stile, we enter Hurdle Field where wool was dried on frames after washing or dyeing, while over the neatly laid hedge on the left is Tenterfield, where cloths were dried on tenterhooks under tension. A sunken track leads down from the house into Tenterfield and in Hurdle Field. We join another sunken way, perhaps also dating from the time of the clothiers, but in use until at least the early twentieth century as it was marked as a track on maps of that time.

Continue along the edge of Pump Wood, where a huge pit drops steeply away close to the edge of the field. It was dug into the Wadhurst Clay and may have been for marl to spread on lighter soils. Cross the field, which was an orchard until fairly recently, through the gate and along the track, passing another large pit to the right, and down to the stream. Beyond the old stone and brick bridge, take footpath **WC345** left (south-east) and cross the field towards Mounthall (once Mud Wall) farm. At the road, kink slightly left and almost immediately right at the road, on to footpath **WC346**.

The footpath runs through fields, around a pond next to a curiously distorted ash tree and then more or less centrally through fields and over the Stepneyford stream. The path emerges on Stepneyford Lane opposite the road to Maplesden, completing the circuit.