



Tonbridge Civic Society January 2024

JANUARY 2024 NEWSLETTER



Better late than never, but Happy New Year!

To kick off 2024 we ask: What is to become of the Angel Centre?

**TCS Chair
Tom Freke**

We know that the council has, “in principle”, decided to replace the building partly because of its poor energy efficiency. In the words of council leader Matt Boughton, “work now commences on the nature of any replacement leisure and community facilities, while our masterplan in Tonbridge town centre takes shape over the coming weeks”.



The Angel Centre

In the face of this, a vociferous campaign has emerged on [Facebook](#), seeking to preserve and refurbish the current building. A summary of their position was written up by the Kent Messenger, [here](#).



We know for sure that any new leisure facility won't be built on the site of the model railway, adjacent to the swimming pool. That was decided at a council meeting earlier in January.

According to the council, “Once we have some initial proposals these will be shared with everyone for comment and I hope to have councillors’ agreement to run a public consultation on any plans arising from this work. The Angel Centre will remain open until a replacement facility is opened, so all the facilities and classes remain available for all to use as they are at the moment.”

The Civic Society will continue to monitor these developments closely, and is preparing a response of its own.

EVENTS

Philip Gale, of the Tonbridge Line Commuters (TLC), joined us in January for an educative and entertaining talk in the first of the year's programme of events. He spoke about how Tonbridge continues to be shaped by the railway, as well as the ongoing relevance of TLC as a pressure group.

Our next event will take place on March 5, also at the Riverside Room, Angel Centre. Doors open from 7:30pm for 8pm start. Refreshments will be provided. The speaker will be Sir Paul Britton and he'll be discussing the architecture of Tunbridge Wells.

Civic Society Events

- March 5 Talk at the Angel Centre. Speaker Sir Paul Britton
- April 21 Walk around Civic Society Design Award winners
- May 7 AGM & Speaker Sally Pearce, Tonbridge Needs Access to Cash
- June 4 Talk at the Angel Centre. Speaker TBD
- June 26 Visit to Long Barn Gardens
- July 21 Civic Society Summer party and Design Award

JANUARY 16 TALK: TONBRIDGE AND THE RAILWAYS



Philip Gale, of Tonbridge Line Commuters (TLC), gave an educative and entertaining talk in the first of the year's events. He described how Tonbridge continues to be shaped by the railway, as well as the ongoing relevance of TLC as a pressure group.

Before the railway, Tonbridge was much smaller: a market town at the head of the navigation for the river, and a junction for various turnpike roads. The population was around 3,000 in 1841. The railway arrived in 1842 (London-Redhill) shortly followed by a branch line to Tunbridge Wells (1845). The direct railway line to London we know today opened in 1868. By 1881 population may have exceeded 9,000, rising to a little over 40,000 today.

Over the next 100 years, more and more people relied on the train for passenger and freight services, as well as the start of commuting to London. Trains were slower than today, and service patterns reflected the times, for example there were fewer Sunday trains.

Commuting to the capital became more popular after 1945 and this, combined with evolving regulation and ownership of the railways, helped foster the creation of Tonbridge and District Travellers Association in 1959 – just a few years before the Civic Society. Early concerns included overcrowding, fare increases, timekeeping, strikes, as well as investment decisions and local planning.

As you can see, concerns of the (now renamed) Tonbridge Line Commuters are much the same as in 1959. For more details, travel tips, as well as how to join (just £4 a year) see their website: tonbridgecommuters.org.uk

SUSAN BEVAN

It is with a heavy heart we report the passing of our Hon. Secretary, Susan Bevan. Susan joined the Civic Society in 2005, already a member of the Historical Society and involved in the proposals around the Market site, now the Market Quarter.

Susan really got her teeth stuck into Tonbridge and was tenacious and determined in all that she took on. Her research was second to none and she had an enviable grip on planning law. Buildings in her sights included 180 High Street, No. 1 Bank Street, The Primrose Inn, The River Centre, The Old Fire Station, and any other development that could be viewed from the Castle. And she will always be with us when any discussions of The Fosse take place!

She was forensic in her reporting, as you who will have seen from her contributions on planning in the newsletters. It is a tribute to her success that councillors messaging their condolences have said "how much they liked Susan, but unfortunately they rarely got on"! She was both shocked and delighted to be asked to join the Executive Committee - she quite enjoyed being a rebel on the outside. In the summer of 2014 she was appointed Honorary Secretary - a position she served until 2023.

Susan loved her life in the Slade, the involvement in the community and loved Tonbridge. There is no doubt that Tonbridge was fortunate to have such a fiery, determined, and sometimes confrontational defender.

Her funeral will take place on Monday March 4 at 1pm at the Kent and Sussex Crematorium. Afterwards, there will be a gathering a 2:15pm at the Old Fire Station in Tonbridge to celebrate Susan and her life.



Susan at her 80th birthday

Tonbridge Civic Society 2023
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NEWS

TMBC is holding a [consultation on graffiti and street art](#) until 29 Feb. The council seeks views, including whether you have noticed an increase in graffiti, and thoughts on graffiti walls.



TMBC seeks your views on graffiti around Tonbridge

Civic Society members are reporting work has begun at the site of the former Beales store. We don't yet know what the plans are but please do keep the reports coming.

The campaign for the a town council in Tonbridge held another meeting in January, and attendees are being invited to form a steering group. Further details [here](#).

The Nelson Arms narrowly missed out on being named the [CAMRA Pub of the Year](#) for the whole of the UK. The community-backed boozer was one of four pubs shortlisted in the national competition.



The Nelson Arms

St Johns Church, Hildenborough would like residents to complete a survey as part of a bid for an 'Info Point' in the churchyard, allowing friends and family to share stories of loved ones and ancestors, accessible from a mobile device.

Works on Tonbridge School old chapel appear to have been completed and the screens removed, restoring the wonderful view of the school buildings from the north end of the High Street.



Tonbridge School old chapel



The newly-planted trees on the Racecourse Sportsground that were damaged last year have been replaced.

The former Natwest on the High Street is to open in June as The Market House serving food and drink, the new owner, Mark Richards, has [told local press](#).



From Natwest Bank to Market House

Finally, Tonbridge's many attractions [hit the headlines](#) after a report claimed the town recorded the second highest of former London residents in the country. A reported 16,000 people had moved to Tonbridge from the capital since 2020. As busy as the town is, I'm not convinced the town has grown by 40% in the last three years!

INTRODUCING: SHIPBOURNE ROAD CHAIN GANG

Perfectly placed for fun family rides, challenging hills or longer coastal excursions (and blessed with two bike shops!) Tonbridge is ideally located for cycling. Despite this, the town has not historically hosted its own cycling club. Moving here from South East London ten years ago, Wayne Thompson changed this with the foundation of the Shipbourne Road Chain Gang (SRCG) which, from small beginnings, now numbers around 50 riders.

We spoke to Wayne about the SRCG and its place in the town.



Wayne Thompson (left) with members of the SRCG

How did the club start...and why?

Although I have family roots in the area, when I moved to Tonbridge ten years ago, I didn't really know anyone. I'd been cycling for a few years in London, mainly commuting or with my rugby club, but I realised Tonbridge was a great spot to get a little bit more serious about my riding.



As it turned out, I saw my next door neighbour out on his bike so we went for a couple of rides, then another neighbour asked to tag along. We mentioned the group to a few other dads at our kids' schools

and we soon had a group of six or seven regulars going out early at weekends so that we could be back in time to help look after our children. It was all very informal at first and retains a relaxed feel to this day. The club name comes from our original members all living in roads close to Shipbourne Road.

When we realised there was a regular sportive (a non-competitive cycle event) held annually in Tonbridge called the Castle 100, which raises money for Action Medical research, we decided to enter as a group and to get some club cycling kit made, with the generous help of a local businessman and club member. People saw us on the ride and asked about the club. From there it has just grown by word of mouth.

How many people have joined and who are they?

We have about 50 riders, some of whom also ride with other local clubs like Southborough District Wheelers or K20 (in Marden). All of our members are male, ranging in age from late 20s to early 60s. We'd welcome females but with Kent Velo Girls - one of the best women's cycling clubs in the country - close by in Hildenborough, women may feel they have better options! Our riders range in ability from beginners to those coming back to cycling and some with more experience, who enter the occasional race, triathlon or sportive, but we are not a racing team.

What does the club bring to the town?

The SRCG exists for anyone who fancies a bike ride in good company. We seldom travel too far or too fast and we are big supporters of local businesses like Fuggles, the Bakehouse, Verdigris, 65mm, the Ivy House and. We set out on club rides early on Saturday or Sunday mornings but you might see us around the area in our distinctive pink, grey and black kit at other times of day - more likely in the Summer months. We are great believers in responsible cycling and keen to see cycling infrastructure develop in the town as it is currently pretty minimal.



Why should people get involved?

We know how difficult it can be for people moving in to a new area to find friends to socialise with, particularly for men. We are a welcoming bunch and we run social events, most of which are organised through our Whatsapp group. For more serious riders, we enter events like Ride London or the Castle 100 sportive and in the last couple of years, we have organised group trips to the French Alps and Belgium. This year are off to the Vosges region of France to tackle some of Europe's most famous mountains.

How can people learn more and get in touch?

Find us on the cycling app Strava: <https://www.strava.com/clubs/SRCG>, via [Instagram @srcgc](#) or email: SRCGTonbridge@gmail.com.