

SNODLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Volume 2, Issue 2

April 1999

SOCIETY NEWS

Correspondence

Correspondence and enquiries about the Society (including applications for membership) should be addressed to Dr. Andrew Ashbee, 214, Malling Road, Snodland, Kent ME6 5EQ (tel. 01634-243001). Subscriptions (payable to Snodland Historical Society) should be sent to the Treasurer, Mr Brian Tansley, 11 Godden Road, Snodland, Kent ME6 5HF. Secretary: Neil Miners, 13 Gorham Close, Snodland, Kent ME6 5EZ.

Meetings

The final meeting of the 1998-99 series will be held at the Devonshire Rooms on Wednesday, 5th May, at 8 p.m. We are delighted to welcome Mr Nigel Nicolson, who will speak on the 'Battle of the Medway in AD 43'. He will outline the reasons why he has sited the memorial on the river bank opposite All Saints church in spite of reservations from some quarters (particularly Sussex, who put forward an alternative venue for the battle).

Summer Activities

The annual Snodland Boundary Walk will be held on Saturday 15 May, starting at Oast Park Golf Course Car Park, Ham Hill, at 10 a.m. The 13-mile route follows Snodland's civil parish boundary as closely as possible, with lunch at Dode Church, finishing back at the Golf Course at approximately 4 p.m. The walk is organized by the Town Council and is led by Neil Miners.

Further details are available from the Council Offices (240228) or Neil Miners (242604).

Our member Judith Bradbury organizes 'Snodland Strolls' 'to encourage new people into walking, thus allowing them the opportunity to enjoy their local countryside on foot.' Details of walks are advertized beforehand around the village, but Judith can be contacted on 0780 33 76418 (mobile telephone).

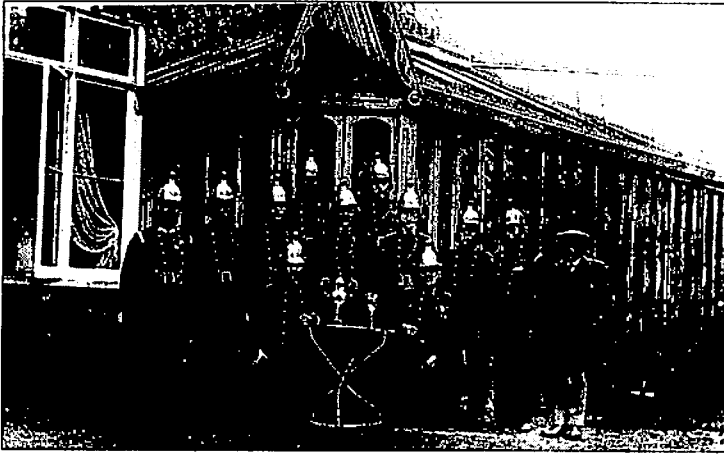
She will be holding a meeting at the Devonshire Rooms on Saturday April 17th at 11 a.m. for all who are interested, to be followed by a walk at 1 p.m. (1-2 hours). A further walk is scheduled for Sunday, 23 May, at 10 a.m.

As part of its research for the 'Defence of Britain' project, the Society will hold an informal evening in the Medway Room, Devonshire Rooms, from 7-30 to 9-30 p.m., and invites all who have memories of wartime in Snodland, or who can supply information about local defences, to call in and tell us. (Interviews/statements will be tape-recorded, or written information can be given.)

It is planned to hold another walk for Society members on Sunday, July 4th. Meet at All Saints Church at 2 p.m. and we will then walk along Church Fields to the marshes.

The Museum

The Town Council has completed work on renovating the Old Fire Station in Waghorn Road in preparation for it to become a Museum. SHS Committee members were invited recently to attend a meeting of the Amenities Committee of

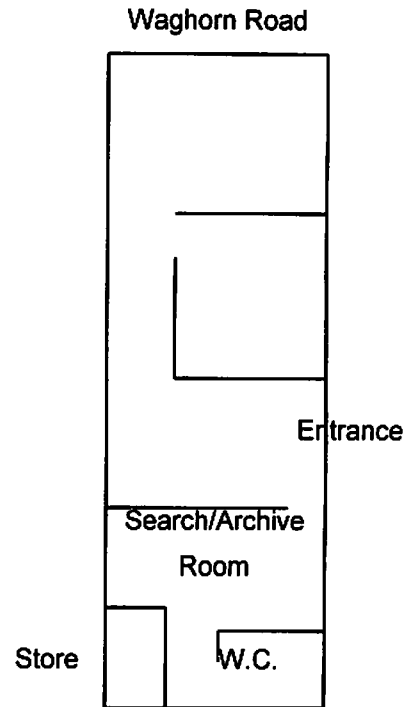


Snodland's Volunteer Firemen with Tom Hilder, the Town Clerk, outside the conservatory formerly at Ivymeath. They were led by Mr C. W. Hinds (in uniform next to Tom Hilder)

the Town Council. We have been asked to mount and maintain all the displays and to provide volunteers to man the building when it is open. (Under terms of the insurance, security remains the responsibility of the Town Council, who will open and lock up the building.) It is hoped that the Museum will be opened 'with a splash' sometime in September. Regular opening times have yet to be decided and can be changed in the light of experience. The expectation is that after an initial flourish, the Museum will be open at fixed times during weekends. School visits can be subject to special arrangements.

This is a big new venture for us, of course, and a challenge. The Committee has spent some time discussing content and layout. At the moment we have access to few artifacts, but many documents and pictures. We hope that loans of material from other collections will be possible, but this may be difficult to arrange.

The aim will be to give a broad view of Snodland's history through displays. Some (i.e. perhaps Romans and early history) may be more or less permanent, but it is intended to rotate others according to particular themes (industry, church, wartime, societies, etc.). These displays will be sited in the entrance hall and the two rooms towards the front. (the middle one at least will contain the changing displays). The Millennium Tapestry will take up the side wall of the corridor. The room at the rear will include a



Sketch plan of the Museum (not to scale)

a computer. This will take time to develop, but a database of parishioners living in Snodland at some time during the nineteenth century is ready (if inevitably still incomplete) - a useful tool for those researching family history. Later this can be expanded and a database of houses should be added, together with various lists for finding particular topics.

Anyone willing to help in any capacity should let the Chairman know, especially those who would be willing to spend an hour or so from time to time in manning the building.

New Pamphlet

Pamphlet No. 10: *Memories of Snodland, 1900-1939* will be on sale at the next meeting of the Society. This has been prepared in the same format as the highly successful *Stroll around Old Snodland* and will sell at £2 [32 pages]. The booklet draws upon the reminiscences of Mrs Mildred Ashbee (1907-1991)—written in about 1980, Mrs Olive Craddock (Mollie Prett), Mrs Daphne Baker (Daphne Prett) and Mrs Joyce Hurley (Joyce Austin). We are very grateful to

the writers for allowing us to print their reminiscences. Full texts have been deposited in the Society's archives. As I have written in the Introduction: 'Memories bring the past to life in a way that is not possible from mere records and statistics. Snodland Historical Society therefore places much importance in acquiring and recording as many reminiscences as possible of life in the village in former times.' Here is a good example of the value of memories. The database of 19th century Snodland persons includes an entry for Levi King. It notes he was born around 1863 and was licensed victualler at the Red Lion in the 1895 directory. He died on 11 March that year, aged 32, as recorded on the memorial in All Saints churchyard. That's all.



*Mr
Levi
King*

Mrs Baker adds much more (including the pictures, from a pendant):

"Mr. Nash was landlord of two public houses in Maidstone during the second half of the nineteenth century. I believe that both still exist today—the Mitre Inn and the Railway Inn near the Maidstone West station. Both daughters helped their father and the whole family were well known to the Brewers. When Laura, the elder daughter, married Mr. King, they came to Snodland and her husband became landlord of the Red Lion at the beginning of the twentieth century [actually earlier, as shown]. Together they worked hard until tragedy struck. They had previously been engaged for ten years and within two years of marriage, her husband was dead. As

the Nash family were so well thought of by the Brewers, Mrs. King was allowed to take over from her late husband and became the landlady of the Red Lion. This was very unusual in those days but Mrs. King was a very unusual Victorian lady. She was a strict disciplinarian—no one ever became drunk in her public house because she refused to serve them when she decided they had had enough. She was also a shrewd business woman. She boasted that her beds were always warm. At the paper mill, night shift workers, finishing at 6 a.m. went into the beds which the day shift workers had just vacated. She started to make a lot of money, at a time when beer was a penny a pint.

She recalled that hop gardens bordered the main road, a toll gate stood at the intersection and vines grew down either side of the High Street, when she first came to Snodland. Esparto grass used to make good quality paper, was brought to the paper mill on large spritsal boats. These boats returned to London carrying paper.

As Snodland started to have more industries, Mrs. King realised the need for more houses. The best builder in the neighbourhood she sought and he built a house for her. Each week she made time to inspect the progress and standard of workmanship of her first house. She paid the builder in cash and when she had accumulated enough money she had another house added to form terraces. These terraced houses were in the Avenue and along Malling and Holborough Roads [e.g. *Beaconsfield Terrace; Alexandra Terrace*]. Mrs. King then expanded her empire and built terraces in Halling and Cuxton. In the late 1920s [actually 1920], her sister Ethel's husband, Amos Judges, died suddenly [a disabled soldier]. She also had been engaged for ten years and married for only two years. Mrs. King left the Red Lion and moved to Strood to live with her sister. Together they set up a profitable dressmakers and milliners business. They both had been trained in these skills before they married.

In 1927 my Father heard that one of Mrs King's houses was becoming vacant. Mrs.

Wenham, Mollie's class teacher at one time, had decided to move because the house was too large for her. Father was refused at first because Mrs. King had strict rules about the people who lived in her houses. Children were definitely not allowed. However Mrs. Wenham spoke well of Mollie's good behaviour and we eventually moved to Beaconsfield Terrace.

*Mrs
Laura
King*



Mrs. King collected the rents from all of her houses, starting on Monday mornings in Snodland. At precisely midday, a rat-a-tat, tat, tat of the end of a pencil, would be heard on our back door. At three years of age, I hid behind Mother's skirt when the door was opened. I noticed, at first, the shining black shoes peeping out from under a full black skirt. Lifting my eyes, I saw a tight waisted, long black coat above which was a dazzling white high necked blouse. Perched on her head was a shiny black straw hat, anchored with a huge hat pin. Over her arm hung a black leather handbag for the rent money and a spiked rolled umbrella, black of course. She wrote in the rent book without removing her gloves. She was a lady of few words. I doubt whether she even saw me. I had been trained at a very early age, never to make a noise when the Black Lady came. Occasionally Mother was told to adjust one of the Venetian blinds at the front of the house as it was not quite level with the others. At other times the blinds were up too high and did not conform to the regulation depth which had been set by her. She checked each week that

the front lawns had been cut and that no flowers had been planted. Her other strict rule was that there was to be no washing on the clothes line on Sundays. Her spies would have reported to her and a warning would be given. One soon learned to obey her rules if you wanted to remain her tenant!

In 1943 her sister Ethel died and Mrs. King returned to Snodland. She lived next door to us for the rest of her life, but that is another story."

Frith & Co.

The Chairman has been in touch with Frith & Co. regarding the commercial photographs which the firm took of Snodland c.1940-1960. He has received samples from their archive and there appear to be about fifteen images among those supplied which do not seem to be held by us or other local collectors. We will obtain copies for the Society's archive. Conversely, we seem to hold others which they have not included among the samples.

Acquisitions

We are very grateful to several persons for obtaining and donating material for the Society's collection. Pictures and documents loaned for copying by Sue Brooks, Bill Gowar, Peter Latter, and John Soane. Donations: a 1704 title deed of property in West Malling owned by the Parker family of Snodland (Mr G. Coulls); two Sunday School prizes (1908 and 1912) (Mrs S. Hunter); photographs of Roman and Saxon excavations (Mr J. Hamilton); newspaper cuttings concerning the Rookery Estate (Mrs J. Pennington); a set of ration books (Mr K. Holdstock); various recent church and twinning photographs (Rev. J. Tipp); A published pamphlet of 1852: "Who Was Swedenborg" (Mr M. Searle); Choral Society photographs (Mrs B. Botterill). Purchase: some old bills (various industries) and house sale brochures (via Mr G. Lancley).

We welcome the following new members

Maj. Gen. R. and Mrs J. Fairburn (USA); Mrs E. A. Hendrie (Sussex); Dr. I and Mrs Y. Jeeves (Croydon); Miss F. Neville (Essex); Mr B. Roff; Mr P. Rootes; Mr and Mrs D. Way.