



THE "50TH ANNIVERSARY"

The Tenterden and District Local History Society was formed on 25 November 1955 at an enthusiastic meeting in the drawing room of the old Tenterden Vicarage, which stood on the site of the present vicarage, attended by about 50 people. Mr C S Bryant, of 36 Ashford Road, presided and it was unanimously agreed to form a society to study local history and also that of the Dens of the surrounding district. It was also agreed to hold about four meetings a year and have two excursions. Prior to the meeting, Mr and Mrs V J Sykes, of Swiss Cottage, Rolvenden had put forward the idea of a Society to people they had met. One afternoon Victor and Hildegard Sykes invited about eight people round for afternoon tea. As they had seemed interested about local things, Hildegard said, "How about starting a Society, all of you? Now write down ten names and addresses of possible people and say whether you consent for one year to be members of the Committee." They complied amiably. Miss Dora Duke, of High Halden, was one of the people who attended the tea party and she remained on the committee until her death in 2004. At the inaugural meeting the following officers were elected: President, Dr R McLaren; Chairman, Mr C S Bryant; Treasurer, Mrs Bryant; Hon Secretaries, Mr and Mrs V J Sykes; Committee, Miss Bowden (Rolvenden), Miss D Duke (High Halden), Miss De Brute (Leigh Green), Mrs Grutter (Smallhythe), Miss Nesbitt and Major Fellowes (Tenterden). At the meeting Miss Grover, secretary of the Kent Local History committee, spoke of its work. Dr McLaren was a local medical doctor practising at a private house named "Athos" (7 East Cross – now Potters) and was Mayor of Tenterden at the time (elected 1954 and Mayor for two years)

The first three meetings were held in the barely furnished drawing room of Tenterden Vicarage and all the wooden chairs from the Glebe Hall were moved over to provide seating. Meetings were held at a time when buses enabled attendance and the return home. Later four meetings were held in the Unitarian Room, but numbers outgrew the seating. The Society decided to move to the upper room at the Eight Bells where there were a number of wooden chairs belonging to a Bridge or Whist Club, but after some time it was found that the brewery was neglecting the accommodation. On one occasion Mr and Mrs Sykes arrived to find that this Club had moved all the chairs to the Vine Inn. Mrs Sykes then bought thirty chairs at a charity sale and had them taken to the Eight Bells. On meeting the landlord she was greeted with "I don't want you or your ---- members!" The chairs were given to Shrubcote Hall and the Society moved to the Vine. The venue was not very satisfactory and after about three meetings the Society settled until 2003 at Tenterden Junior School in Recreation Ground Road. Since 2003, meetings have been held at Tenterden Zion Baptist Church. For many years now the Society has held monthly lectures from October to April with summer outings.

The Society has celebrated several of its anniversaries. The 25th Anniversary was celebrated with a party in the Town Hall when Miss M Mansell gave a short talk on her experiences as a member of the Local History Society. There was also a display of local photographs taken in the Twenties and Thirties by the late Horace Ashdown who had run a photographer's business at 44 High Street (now Orvis). The 30th anniversary party was held in the Town Hall in November 1985 and attended by 74 members. At this event Mrs Sykes outlined the early days of the society and Dr Bernard Burgess gave a talk about the Tenterden Mutual Improvement Society in 1847. The society proposes to celebrate its 50th anniversary in 2005 with a lunch at Little Silver in St Michaels on Sunday 27 November 2005. Mrs Sykes, although over 90, still takes an interest in the Society and is an Honorary Life Member. Over the years extensive scrapbooks of Tenterden have been kept in Tenterden Museum, an extensive library has been built up in Tenterden Library and for the last three years members have been receiving a half-yearly newsletter. A book detailing life in 20th Century Tenterden has also been produced and will be available to members as early as possible in the forthcoming 2005/6 season.

Before the History Society was born, the Kent and East Sussex Railway (KESR), which was known as the Rother Valley Railway prior to 1904, had come and gone as a passenger railway. The KESR was built under the Light Railway Act of 1896 and the line from Robertsbridge to Rolvenden (then Tenterden Station) was opened in 1900. The line was extended up to Tenterden in 1903 and to Headcorn in 1905. The railway company was often in financial trouble up to the period after the 1939-1945 War and the line fared no better under rail nationalisation in 1948. Passenger traffic finished on Saturday 4 January 1954 but freight traffic ran between Robertsbridge and Tenterden until 1961. The section of track from Tenterden to Headcorn was

soon lifted after closure in 1954. The remaining railway has become a preservation railway running between Tenterden and Bodiam with the initial stretch between Tenterden and Rolvenden being officially opened by William Deedes (later Lord Deedes) on 1 June 1974.

In June 1946 Punch printed the following poem on the KESR.

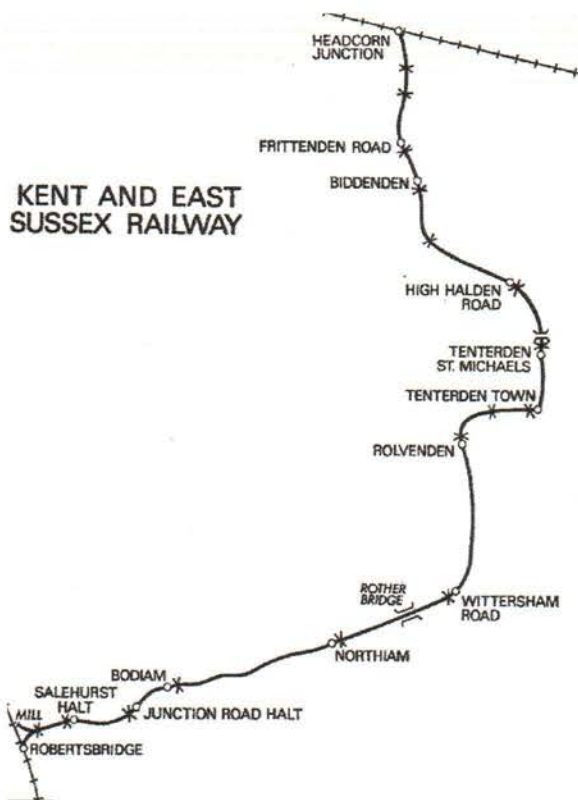
Ever seen a railway train
Wheel deep in the wheat?
Poppies on the boiler dome:
Wreaths of meadow-sweet
Twined about the driving wheel -
Burnished brass and polished steel:
Puffs of steam like woolly lambs,
On the line to Bodiam

His chimney's tall and thin and crowned
With a bell-mouthed top,
Brassbound
All round.
He's painted green like new spring grass
And he's always pausing
At the level crossing
To let the farm carts pass.

He sees real trains at Headcorn Halt,
Where he's rather shy
As they thunder by
From lordly London to the Coast.
For they're very long
And he's very short,
And he wonders if they give him thought:
But at Metersham you'll hear him boast
That his very best mate's
The eleven-eight -
The Dover Express that's never late.

But -
As soon as he gets out of sight
Of the Main Line with its metal bright
Then once again
He becomes THE TRAIN
And there's pride and swank
In every puff, as he goes chuff, chuff,
With a piercing whistle now and then
(Get out of the way, you silly hen)
On his lordly way
To Newenden.

He puffs past farms,
He steams past barns,
To the Biddenden Maids he tells tall yarns.
He's a snorting giant
At Freezing Hill
He whistles the miller
At Northiam Mill,
He puffs the day's news
At the crossing gate
And says what a shame he's
Five minutes late
And snorts of course
It's the Main Line's fault!



[NB Metersham is on the Sussex side of the River Rother overlooking the Railway between Wittersham Halt and Northiam Staion]

He carries grain and he carries hops,
Wherever you hail him, there he stops!
In fact, he's a friendly sort of train.
He takes out shopping farmers' wives:
He carries a load of bees hives:
And he carries pigs,
And oats
And goats
And several boxes of lollipops
For the village kids
At the village shops.

He knows the Marsh and he knows the Weald,
He knows each wood and he knows each field:
With his bright green paint
And his glistening brass;
The rabbits stop
To see him pass,
And Arcadia's just another station
On his twice-a daily
Pere-
grination!