A small corner of England; a huge chunk of history



THE STORY OF THE PANTILES, ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS









PAN MILES

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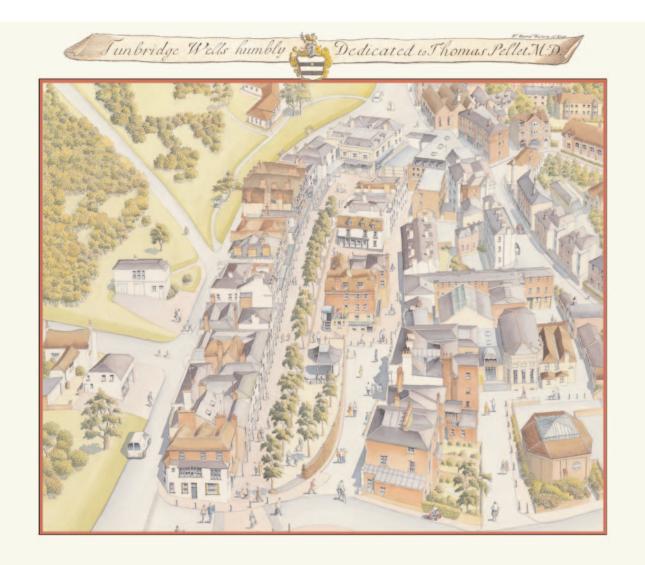
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The story of the Pantiles, Tunbridge Wells

Every corner of this land has its own unique history. The fascinating story of the Pantiles at Tunbridge Wells is like none other, and yet full of familiar names and touching memories of more than 400 years of English heritage.

This book is a gift to Tunbridge Wells in celebration of all those who made "The Walks" on the *Queen's Wells* such an enchanting corner of England, and those who remain tirelessly committed to an even more exciting future for the Pantiles.



In 2006, marking 400 years of the Pantiles, the local artist David Ramshaw paid homage to Jan Kip's engraving of a bird's eye view of Tunbridge Wells from 1719, by this illustration of the modern day Pantiles from the same angle. (See Jan Kip's original on page 24 alongside an aerial photo of the Pantiles in 2008).

The Walks ... The Parade ... The Royal Parade ... Ye olde Pantyles ... The Pantiles !

1606–2006 ... and beyond.







First there was water,

... and a chance encounter.

Riding through the forest back to London from a retreat at Eridge – the seat of the Baron of Bergavenny (now Abergavenny) – the 25 year old Lord North noticed a spring with strangely coloured water. It reminded him of a Chalybeate (iron-impregnated) water he had encountered at a spa on the continent. He took a sample of the water to London to test its medicinal qualities, and the legend of Tunbridge Wells was born!

The year was 1606.





North's physician declared, to the young Lord's delight, that the water was indeed capable of, among other things, curing "the colic and the melancholy; ...it made the lean fat and the fat lean"!

Lord North kept returning to drink more of the miraculous water on the edge of the Manor of Rusthall, soon accompanied by many of his friends at the Court of king Charles I! He lived to the grand age of 85, a great endorsement for the waters at Tunbridge Wells.











The lady from the cottage next to the waters, Mrs Humphreys, who handed the first bowl of water to Lord North became the first "dipper" for the rest of her life; a tradition kept to this date by generations of "dippers", though not all of them have lived to be 102 years old, like Mrs Humphreys!

The Royal Heritage

The waters' fame brought Henrietta Maria, the queen of Charles I, in 1629 to recuperate from the loss of her first son. The Royal party camped in what is now known as Tunbridge Wells Common, and the queen stayed for six weeks, soon afterwards to conceive her second son – later, King Charles II – a further endorsement for the amazing qualities of the waters.

A book titled "The Queen's Wells" authored by a Dr Rowzee was published after her visit, in praise of the virtues of the water at Tunbridge Wells.







The Spring was within the Manor of Rusthall, but it was Lord Abergavenny who owned the land to the south of the wells who in 1608 laid the first stone pavements and wooden rails around the Spring to create an enclosure. By the mid 1630's a walk and a few wooden buildings had appeared around the water. It would take another 30 years untill Lord Muskerry, the new Lord of the Manor of Rusthall, did the first refurbishment of the wells and the surroundings, before being killed in action during the Anglo-Dutch in 1665. His widow donated the land for the chapel of King Charles the Martyr which opened its doors to the wells' visitors in 1678. She then sold the Manor of Rusthall to Thomas Neal, Master of the Royal Mint, who embarked on a major development work around the waters.



Days of courtship!

Soon Tunbridge Wells becomes a desirable destination for the upper-class pleasure seekers and the *in* crowd of late 17th century England, rather than those in search of health and harmony!

This was behind the kind of carefree and at times vulgar image of Tunbridge Wells presented on the stages of London with plays such as "Tunbridge Wells; or a Day's Courtship" by Thomas Rawlind (1678) and "Tunbridge – Walks" by Thomas Baker (1703).

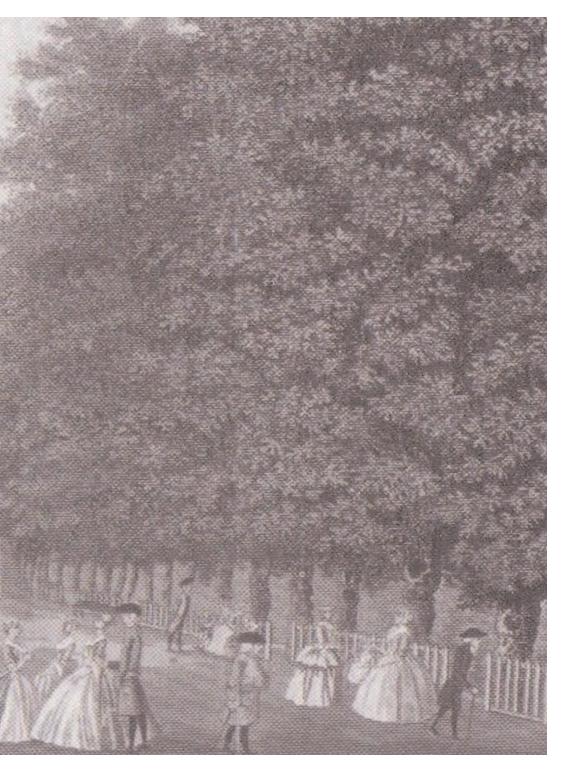


John Wilmot, the 2nd Earl of Rochester, after staying at Tunbridge Wells in summer of 1675 deprecates the visitors to the Waters with a poem which begins with the following lines:

At five this Morn, when Phoebus raised his head From Thetis' Lap, I raised myself from bed, And mounting Steed, I trotted to the Waters, The Rendezvous of Fools, Buffoons and Praters, Cockolds, Whores, Citizens, their Wives and Daughters. My squeamish Stomach I with Wine had bribed To undertake the Dose it was prescribed: But turning Head a cursed, sudden Crew, That innocent Provision Overthrew, And without drinking made me Purge and Spew.

From Coach and Six, a Thing unwieldy rolled, Whom lumber Cart more decently would hold: As wise as Calf it looked, as big as Bully, But handled, proved a mere Sir Nichols Cully.

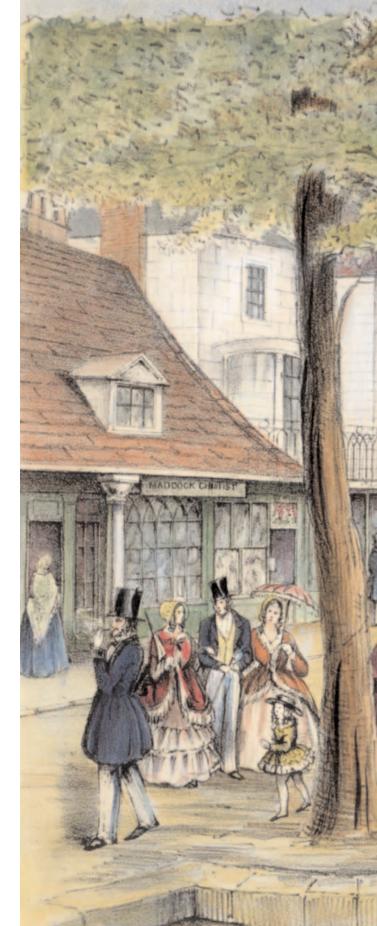




The 18th century brings back respectability to Tunbridge Wells. By the summer of 1736 Beau Nash the legendary Master of Ceremonies from Bath, now in charge of entertainments at the Wells, managed to attract more than one thousand resident visitors to the Pantiles.

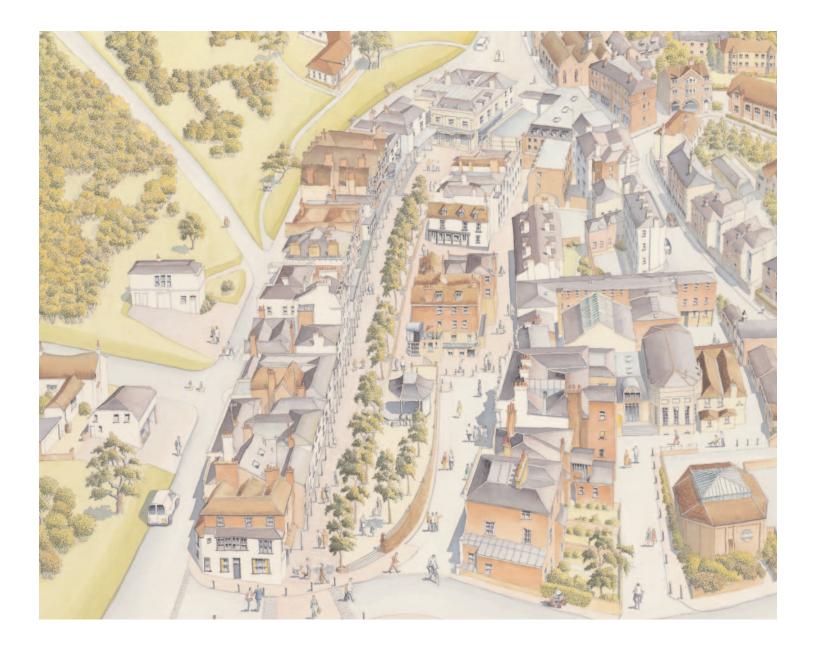
These included Sir Robert Walpole, the Prime Minister (complete with mistress) and a long list of dignitaries including 7 Dukes, 33 Marquesses, Earls and Barons, 16 Knights and three members of parliament, all with wives, daughter and other relatives in taw."

The original walk "was to remain, through many changes, the basic plan of a Parade focused on the waters where later the fashionable world would stroll under the avenue of tall trees, drink coffee, sample waters from the market stalls, gossip, gamble and sometimes forget that the purpose of their visit was to take quantities of the ironflavoured waters" *











A bird's eye view

The opposite page is the 1719 engraving of Tunbridge wells by Jan Kip, next to the modern day interpretation of the same view by David Ramshaw (2006) and an aerial photo of the Pantiles (2008).





Over the centuries Tunbridge Wells has grown and changed with time, but The Common, where Queen Henrietta Maria and her entourage camped during her first visit to the Waters in 1629 has remained a constant feature of the area and retained its lush natural beauty as seen in a recent aerial photo.

To this date, the Tunbridge Wells Common as well as the Rusthall Common further to the west remain part and parcel of the ownership title of the Pantiles and



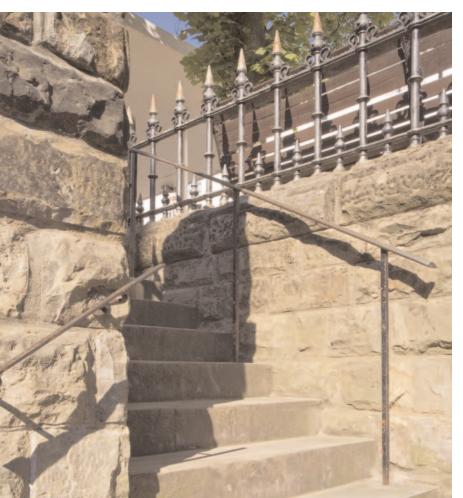
A day at the Pantiles

Today's visitors can still sample some of the pleasures of the old in a more genteel and less formal surrounding which combines centuries old charm of the Pantiles with a touch of continental outdoor living.













The colonnade still includes a few of the original columns dating back to the end of 17th century (outside No48), next to other reminders of 400 years of architecture and craftsmanship in the Pantiles.













THE SITE NOW OCCUPIED BY NOS. 40.46 THE PANTILES WAS THAT OF THE ASSEMBLY AND GREAT GAMING ROOMS, PRESIDED OVER BY BEAU NASH, WHO WAS MASTER OF CEREMONIES 1735.1761







Through the ages

The illustration above is of the imposing building of the theatre built by Mrs Sarah Baker at the turn of 19th century. The building later became the Corn Exchange, with the statue of Ceres the Godess of Harvest on its skyline, and is now a charming recreation and shopping centre.









Where once Beau Nash inaugurated the season every year and walked around to encourage all to "talk to anyone of whatever rank or sex", now carefree sun-worshipers of the 21st century enjoy the tranquility of a summer day at the Pantiles.

RICHARD 'BEAU' NASH 1674-1762

TUNBRIDGE

Dandy and leader of fashion Master of the Ceremonies at the Wells 1735-1762 Fourth CENTENARY





In the glory days of Mrs Bakers theatre, next door was the Sussex Hotel, to be renamed the Royal Victoria when Princess Victoria and her mother Duchess of Kent spent a night there in 1834. The hotel was allowed to display their Coat of Arms on the top of the building. The building is not a hotel anymore, though the name and the Coat of Arms still adorn the facade.







The hotel still remaining on the Pantiles is the Swan hotel, established in 1835 as the Swan Inn. The origin of the building can be seen in Kip's engraving of 1719 as the "High House". The Swan Passage next to to the building leads to London Road and across to the Tunbridge Wells Common.











In addition to a wealth of yesterday's art and architecture, the Pantiles is also home to a number of modern day art galleries.









And the fascination with the Pantiles and its unique charm; where at once you can live the history and sense the promise of the future, will continue ...





Acknowledgement

In preparing this book we have benefited from many valuable sources and have been assisted by a number of institutions and individuals, to whom we owe a debt of gratitude.



Targetfollow Group is the proud owner of the Pantiles, Tunbridge Common and the Rusthall Common. The Group is committed to the enhancement of the image of the Pantiles and improvement of the quality of life as well as sustainability of the environment in and around the Pantiles and the Commons.

As a conscientious property owner and developer, Targetfollow works closely with the local authorities and other stakeholders to gain a better understanding of the local needs and sensitivities. The Group's aim is to be an active partner in realising the dreams and ambitions of the community for a brighter future for the Pantiles and Tunbridge Wells.



