

## Tenterden Streets, an Introduction

Tenterden probably dates back to Saxon times as shown by its name *Tenet wara denn* – the pig pasture belonging to the men of (the Isle of) Thanet. There would have been known drove routes through the near impenetrable forest of the Weald and Tenterden is found at the meeting of two such ancient tracks from Thanet to dens and pastures in the Weald and the marshes around Tenterden, Rolvenden and Oxney. Then the coastline of Kent was very different with much of the low lying land from Smallhythe through Romney Marsh under the sea. Tenterden sits East to West on a reasonably level ridge above this low lying land, above the steep hill on the Woodchurch Road leading to the Golf Club, the long slope down the Appledore Road to Reading Street, Summer Hill on the Smallhythe Road and the long slope down to Rolvenden Railway Station. Only the road North through St Michaels and on to Biddenden runs along the height of the ridge.

Amongst the earliest recorded history of Tenterden is a dispute related to roads. This was late in the thirteenth century when stall holders encroached on the High Street – the *regiam stratum* – causing the constriction just south of St Mildred's church still seen today.

We should not think of these as roads in the modern sense. Many of the roads in and around Tenterden were mere trackways which came and went over time. There was a road from Leigh Green to Hopes Grove and on to Morghew, shown on old maps, which is now a mere footpath (Kent County Council footpath AB35). Just one example of several. The Wealden clay baked hard in the summer sun but formed a quagmire in the winter. Horses would sink up to their bellies and carts to their axles in the sticky mud.

From the 1760s turnpike trusts were set up to build and maintain roads – an early form of road-usage charging. The Tenterden Turnpike Trust, set up in 1762, was responsible for the road from Cranbrook to Appledore (which continued to New Romney) soon adding branches to Biddenden (1762) and Rolvenden (1769). The Bethersden Trust, also set up in 1762, was responsible for the road to Ashford and the Woodchurch Trust, only set up in 1820, included the Tenterden to Woodchurch road in its responsibilities. However, turnpike roads were of variable quality – macadamisation was not introduced until the 1820s – and the Bethersden road was so notoriously poor that the army was drafted in to rebuild the road between 1798-1802. Over 250 years later it is these roads which still form the backbone highways through Tenterden.

Turnpikes were obliged to set up milestones and the original Tenterden milestone still stands in the High Street outside the Pebbles. This is where the old Tenterden Toll Gate used to stand until it was demolished about 1880 to be burnt, amidst great rejoicing, on the Guy Fawkes bonfire.

From the middle of the nineteenth century through to the middle of the twentieth century the population of Tenterden remained fairly static. The few new houses that were built during that time formed ribbon development following the lines of existing roads – the Ashford Road in the nineteenth century; Golden Square and Beacon Oak Road at the turn of the centuries. In the latter half of the twentieth century the population of Tenterden doubled. Furthermore the number of people living per dwelling reduced significantly – from 5.6 in 1831 to 2.2 in 2011. The commensurate increase in housing was achieved by infill and new estates behind the old road structure.

Formal naming of roads is something that developed around the start of the twentieth century. Old maps and census returns show few actual street names. The High Street, Ashford Road and Beacon Oak Lane and a number of lanes are named but there is no Woodchurch Road, Appledore Road, Oaks Road or East Hill. A St Michaels census return includes "Road Leading to Wheelwrights Shop". Many properties had an address of just the house name followed by "Tenterden". The life of a postman must have been difficult.

However, since 1925 urban authorities – for Tenterden this is Ashford Borough Council – have been obliged to set up street names plates. Old streets were named as were the new streets from Tenterden's growth. All these names can be found on the national street register for all of England and Wales. In February 2021 there were 147 "official" streets in Tenterden. Here is the story of these streets, and some which have been lost, and how they came to be named.