# TRACING YOUR
# KENT
# ANCESTORS

## A GUIDE FOR FAMILY & LOCAL HISTORIANS

DAVID WRIGHT

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# FAMILY HISTORY FROM PEN & SWORD

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**FAMILY HISTORY**

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# PREFACE

If your ancestors originated in the ancient, fascinating and diverse county of Kent, you will be well served by its large and rich collections of historical documents; for this county, along with the rest of the country, has not been invaded since 1066, and so its archives still retain many documents dating back a thousand years and more, along with great quantities of other items from its borough collections and 400 or so ancient parishes. Some of the earliest genealogical pioneers were Kentish and so you may consequently enjoy consulting many of the county's important indexes in the course of extending your pedigree.

The three principal archives are at Canterbury, Maidstone and Rochester, but north-west Kent also has several local archive centres, and family history societies and groups are evenly spread throughout the county offering help, advice, talks and lectures. Further afield, but easily accessible, the London Metropolitan Archives holds much material relating to those parts of north-western Kent now within Greater London, while The National Archives (formerly the Public Record Office) at Kew offers the researcher almost unlimited riches in all aspects of genealogy, perhaps most especially for the mediaeval period where some sets of records survive in unbroken sequences for nearly 800 years. Details of all of these sources can be found in the Directory at the back of the book. I have been working in archives in Kent and London for nearly forty years, and have had the pleasure of handling a great many different types of records over that long period. If you are a beginner, Chapter 2 on principal sources should set you up and gently introduce you to a mixture of original and online material. In chapters 3 and 4 I give a broad overview of the great wealth of material available in archives in both Kent and London from early mediaeval charters to modern electoral registers.

But no matter what experience you have under your belt, do first read the chapter on preliminaries and remind yourself that this fascinating hobby is not an easy one to get right: to err is human, and I certainly made lots of mistakes when first setting out on the long and never-quite-complete journey of researching my family tree. If you avoid some of the traps that I fell into, then this book will have proved its worth.

David Wright,
November 2015



*Ash (by Sandwich): a large church in an enormous parish. Perhaps thirty or more generations of many local families lie buried here. (Copyright Neil Anthony)*

# ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| **BL** | British Library |
| **BRS** | British Record Society |
| **CCA** | Canterbury Cathedral Archives |
| **GOONS** | Guild of One Name Studies |
| **GRO** | General Register Office |
| **HOL** | House of Lords Record Office |
| **KAS** | Kent Archaeological Society |
| **KFHS** | Kent Family History Society |
| **KHLC** | Kent History and Library Centre |
| **LMA** | London Metropolitan Archives |
| **MALSC** | Medway Area Local Studies Centre |
| **NWKFHS** | North West Kent Family History Society |
| **ODNB** | Oxford Dictionary of National Biography |
| **SOG** | Society of Genealogists |
| **TNA** | The National Archives |

KENT PARISH BOUNDARIES PRE-c.1870

*Reproduced from An Historical Atlas of Kent, ed. T. Lawson and D. Killingray, by permission.*
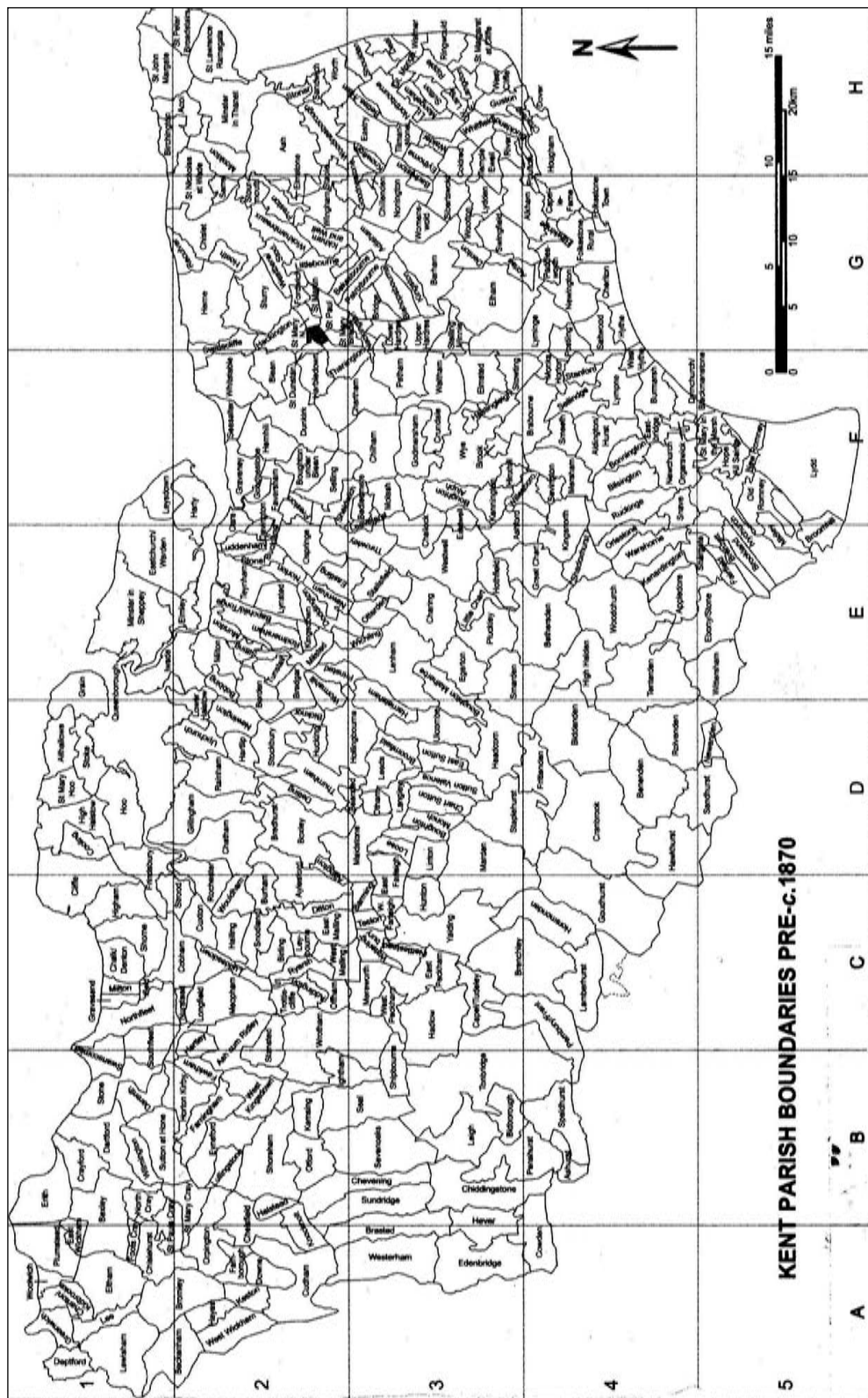
# INTRODUCTION

## Some Kentish History and Geography

At nearly a million acres Kent was the tenth largest of the English historical counties, and one that has stood nobly for centuries as the gateway to England from the Continent, with a considerable part of its bulk lying closer to France than it does to London. Many famous and picturesque towns and castles hug its long shoreline, and the disparate landscape stretches from the isles of Sheppey and Thanet to Romney Marsh to the Weald to the marshes and parishes in the north-west, these now within the M25 and fairly engulfed by the London metropolis.

National landmarks such as Dover Castle and four of the former ancient Cinque Ports have guarded its shores and welcomed or repulsed strangers for nearly a thousand years; attractive and ancient towns such as Faversham, Hythe, Sandwich and Tenterden still welcome many visitors; the two cathedrals (a nationally unique distinction) of Canterbury and Rochester lie within the two oldest dioceses; and the county town of Maidstone sits on the River Medway, deliberately chosen for its more or less exact position in the centre of the county.

Ancient borders with Sussex, Surrey and Middlesex, as well as with Essex just across the River Thames and France a mere 20 miles away, mean that genealogical and historical research can never be conducted in a vacuum. The passage of incoming and outgoing peoples has never ceased – some have come and stayed, such as the French Huguenots in Canterbury and Sandwich, but far more have gone in that great human diaspora which has taken Kentish inhabitants to reside in the farthest parts of the planet, to Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, the Americas and the Far East.

Generally rising sea levels mean that much of the Kentish coastline has changed almost beyond recognition since the Anglo-Saxon period. Thanet is now well and truly attached to the mainland, hardly at all separated by the placid Wantsum Channel which was once navigable

and guarded by a Roman fort at either end. Sheppey is today a single entity now that its daughter islands of Elmley and Harty cling so closely to their ancient mother; the Isle of Oxney and the former ports of Fordwich, Romney, Sandwich and Smallhythe now all lie stranded many miles from the sea, mostly after huge landscape-changing mediaeval storms; and meanwhile, at the very southern tip, the shingle bank of Dungeness annually gains a few more yards as it stretches ever outwards towards France.

A great deal of antiquity remains, even for the casual observer. The very name of Kent itself is a Celtic one and cognate with *Cantium*, the name that Julius Caesar gave to that part of Britain lying within sight of Gaul which he would visit fleetingly in 55–54 BC. From Canterbury radiate substantially unchanged Roman roads to Reculver, Richborough, Dover and Lympne; and north-westwards strikes Watling Street (the present A2), the first link between Britain and Rome at the beginning of the Christian era. The villa at Lullingstone, the fort at Reculver and the pharos at Dover stand as just three of the many Roman antiquities within the county, dating at various times from after AD 43 when the Roman invasion of Britain commenced with its landing at Richborough under the commander Aulus Plautius. Romans roads were so well marked that they long outlived their builders, sometimes being adopted as parish or even partial county boundaries.

The Roman withdrawal began in or soon after 410, in anticipation of internal collapse in the rest of the empire. Britain had now to look to itself for security and protection. More frequent raids by Saxon and other pagan peoples meant that Kent was increasingly helpless and led to King Vortigern promising the Isle of Thanet as a reward to those Continental tribes who would come to his and the nation's aid. The initial force was led by Hengist and Horsa in 449, from a people described by Bede as Jutes. In reality they were probably a Frankish race from the middle Rhine, a fact easily evidenced by the many parish names ending in *–ing* and *–ham*, so very close to the modern German *–ingen* and *–heim*.

The reign of King Ethelbert as *Bretwalda*, or overlord of all the kingdoms south of the River Humber, saw the landing of St Augustine, the papal envoy, at Ebbsfleet in Thanet in 597 to begin the long and uncertain reconversion of England to Christianity. Early converts used St Martin's Church in Canterbury, still today substantially Roman in

*Reculver: Roman fort and Anglo-Saxon church lie cheek by jowl with much of the former now under the sea. (Copyright Neil Anthony)*

fabric and perhaps the most venerable church in all England. Thus was founded the Diocese of Canterbury with Augustine as first archbishop overseeing lands covering some two-thirds of the county as far west as the River Medway. Shortly before his death in 604, Augustine created the Diocese of Rochester to cover the rest of Kent, installing Justus as its first bishop.

This unique division would ultimately give Rochester some 132 ancient parishes and Canterbury 281, figures that hardly changed until 1845 when Deptford, Greenwich, Lewisham and Woolwich were lost, first to the Bishopric of London, and then to Southwark in 1904. In 1926, following the creation of many Victorian daughter parishes, the county total was 476.

Early Christianity struggled before flourishing. The uncertain and drawn-out process is evidenced by such sixth- and seventh-century place names as Alkham, Elham and Wye, each recalling a heathen settlement, and also Woodnesborough, preserving the pagan Wodin in its etymology. The first two English religious houses were both in Canterbury, St Augustine's Abbey, the burial place of many early archbishops, and Christ Church Priory, each founded in about 600 by

St Augustine. Early nunneries were established at Folkestone and Lyminge in the 630s, and at Minster-in-Sheppey and Minster-in-Thanet in the 670s. All were subject to constant Danish raids: Sheppey was overrun in 835 and Canterbury attacked in 842, although the first battle involving an English fleet gained it a victory off Sandwich in 850. There were notable over-winterings by the Vikings at Thanet in 850, on Sheppey in 854, the establishment of an encampment at Appledore in 892 and a fortress near Milton Regis in 893.

By the later eighth century the Kentish royal line had died out and the county was subsumed under the overlordship of Mercia, submitting to Wessex in 825 and finally becoming a shire county presided over by its own *ealdorman*, or earl, within the Kingdom of England. At the time of Domesday in 1086 the population of Kent was about 70,000, the largest town of Canterbury having about 5,000 inhabitants. Folkestone and its hinterland were the most densely populated with about seventeen people to the square mile, followed by the Medway Valley and much of north-east and east Kent with twelve. By far the sparsest, and indeed at this time almost empty, was the Wealden district to the south-west, where many large parishes and future iron- and cloth-making industries would not be opened up until the 1500s. By the time of the Lay Subsidy of 1334/5 the county population was around 125,000, dropping by about a quarter after the Black Death.

Following persuasive arguments by the newly elected Archbishop Lanfranc at the councils of Winchester and Windsor in 1073, the northern province of York was limited to the country north of the Humber, while the see of Canterbury now took jurisdiction over everywhere else, including Wales, to the south. Henceforth the Archbishop of Canterbury would preside at national councils with the nation's second and third men, the Archbishop of York and the Bishop of London, at his right and left hands respectively. The mother see of England maintained a visible presence, but not just at Canterbury: sixteen other archiepiscopal residences were spread widely at locations including Knole, Northfleet and Otford to the west, Gillingham and Maidstone in the centre, and Charing, Lyminge, Saltwood and Wingham to the east.

By the time of the Normans and Plantagenets Kent was well established and starting to fall into the pattern of national history. Its appellation of the 'Garden of England', familiar to most, is still borne

out by the farming practices that Julius Caesar described, as well as by Mr Pickwick's three-fold horticultural description of apples, hops and cherries. King Stephen founded his great abbey at Faversham and, if buried in the town, as is generally believed, represents the only royal burial in a parish church in England. Canterbury witnessed the murder of its Archbishop Thomas à Becket in 1170 and the start of what would be the second greatest place of pilgrimage in the land, to be immortalised by Chaucer, perhaps a Kentish man himself. Dover saw the arrival of the first Dominican friars in 1220, followed shortly afterwards by a small group of nine Franciscans making their way to Canterbury in 1224. The group of four Kentish Cinque Ports flourished between about 1150 and 1350, but by the time of the Tudors only Dover remained of any consequence, the rest having lost their harbours to the continuous silting process that gradually and inexorably took the sea further and further away.

By the later eleventh century about half the cultivable land in Kent was in the hands of the Church, chiefly the archbishops of Canterbury and Rochester, and Christ Church Priory and St Augustine's Abbey, both at Canterbury. The Conqueror had granted the rest of the county to six of his Norman supporters, retaining only the enormous manor of Milton Regis and three others. It was Odo, his half-brother, Bishop of Bayeux, who received the greatest rewards in the form of some 200 manors right across the county. In the vulnerable south-east Hugh de Montfort, Constable of England, and a reliable knight and Hastings veteran, was given possession of almost the entire area excepting only the archbishop's important manor of Saltwood, which he duly held as that prelate's tenant. It was here that Hugh would consolidate his defensive position by building Saltwood Castle.

Other castles served to protect the interior and subject the inhabitants, those at Leeds, Saltwood, Tonbridge and West Malling yielding importance only to Canterbury, Dover and Rochester. Others were situated at Allington, Chilham, Eynsford and Sutton Valence. Feudalism suited a mainly rural society, but such towns as existed fitted awkwardly into its pattern: Canterbury, Dover, Faversham, Fordwich, Hythe, Rochester, Romney and Sandwich were termed boroughs and lay outside the normal manorial organisation. Little larger than a modern village, they were closely linked with the surrounding countryside, although many of the townsmen were engaged in trade.

All of them except Canterbury were favourably situated for commerce in being sea or river ports, thus affording opportunities for overseas trade (especially Dover and Sandwich) as well as taking part in the enormously important mediaeval fishing industry.

The county abounded in religious houses from 1220 until the Henrician dissolution. There were Benedictine monasteries at Canterbury, Dover, Faversham and Rochester; Benedictine nunneries at Canterbury, Davington, Higham, Minster-in-Sheppey and Malling; Augustinian canons at Bilsington, Canterbury, Combwell, Leeds, Lesnes and Tonbridge; about a dozen mendicant orders of friars widely scattered from Greenwich to Sandwich; single houses of Cistercians at Boxley and Cluniacs at Monks Horton; Praemonstratensian canons at Bradsole and Langdon; and a handful of alien houses, which mostly closed in the 1400s.

Kent differed greatly from other parts of the country in the way in which mediaeval land was divided. In the Midlands and elsewhere the open-field system prevailed whereby (1) a village or township had attached to it (usually) three large fields; (2) the owners of houses each possessed a number of strips of land in the fields which were often redistributed in order that everybody in turn got a fair share of the best and worst land; (3) from a certain date each year every owner had the right to graze a specified number of beasts in the fields; (4) the way in which the fields were used and disputes settled was supervised by the Court Baron; and (5) one of the fields was usually left fallow every second or third year. The fields were 'open' in that the strips were not enclosed by hedges, and they were 'common' in that everyone in common with his neighbours had a right to pasture his beasts in the field after a certain date. Although there are traces in Kent of small 'common' fields, and in the east there were 'open' fields, unenclosed by hedges, this was not the same as the common, open-field system. East Kent had many fields that were large and unenclosed and seemingly held in strips, but they were not common fields and there was no annual redistribution of strips and no right of pasturing beasts in common. Rather, each tenant pastured his beasts on his own lands after the harvest had been gathered and had to put up wattle fences to prevent his cattle straying on to another man's land.

Kent's famous gavelkind system of holding land differed significantly from other land tenures in that when an owner died

intestate his land was divided equally between all surviving sons instead of passing solely by primogeniture to the eldest. This frequently led to endless division and subdivision of holdings and the splitting up of fields into little parcels or 'strips' to ensure that all surviving sons received a fair share of the best and worst of their parent's lands. This sometimes cumbrous practice diminished only slowly, not finally being outlawed until 1925.

Between 1750 and 1850, therefore, the only enclosure practised in Kent was that touching parts of rough common or wasteland or of marsh reclaimed from the sea or rivers. By Act of Parliament Barming Heath, Bexley Heath, Brasted Chart, Bromley Common, Coxheath, East Malling and Ditton Commons, Rhodes Minnis at Lyminge, Swingfield Minnis and Wrotham Heath were all enclosed, as were the marshes at Burham, Crayford, Erith, Queenborough and Wouldham. In spite of all these enclosures a good many common lands still survive, both small and large.

The cataclysm of the Dissolution of the Monasteries fell heavily on the two most valuable properties of Christ Church and St Gregory's priories at Canterbury, the next most valuable being Boxley Abbey, Dover Priory, Faversham Abbey, Leeds Priory, Lesnes Abbey, Rochester Priory and Tonbridge Priory. Most other houses were far poorer and often had never really recovered after the Black Death, so much so that when the king's commissioners began their inspections many of the famous houses, such as Bilsington and Boxley, contained residents barely into double figures. All the monastic possessions were transferred to the Crown, some to be granted out again immediately, others later to be sold or granted to favourites within the king's circle. At the conclusion, two-thirds remained in the ecclesiastical ownership of Canterbury or Rochester, the rest divided between eleven laymen, notable among them Sir Thomas Wyatt of Allington who acquired Boxley Abbey and Aylesford Friary, and Sir Thomas Cheyney of Minster-in-Sheppey who was granted Faversham Abbey and the priories at Davington and Minster-in-Sheppey.

Henry VIII was energetic in building castles at Deal, Sandgate, Sandown and Walmer to repel possible French and Spanish invasions along a low-lying coast. These were complemented by other coastal castles or forts at Dover, Folkestone, Gillingham, Gravesend with Milton, Sheerness and Upnor, this last-mentioned to protect Chatham

Dockyard. Later defence arrangements included a comprehensive series of Armada beacons stretched across much of the county (only at Birling could sightlines across the North Downs be maintained) and a semaphore telegraph system which ran from Deal to Chatham and on to London.

Around 1700 the largest towns in Kent were Canterbury, Deptford, Dover, Rochester, and Sandwich, followed by Chatham, Deal, Faversham, Gravesend, Greenwich, Maidstone and Woolwich. Lesser in size were Ashford, Bromley, Cranbrook, Dartford, Folkestone, Hythe, New Romney, Sevenoaks, Strood, Tenterden and Tonbridge. The 1662–4 Hearth Tax returns now suggest a countywide household total of about 33,000 and a population of perhaps 140,000.

Large numbers of defences were constructed from about 1770 in anticipation of a French invasion. A government survey of the Thames and Medway defences revealed many weaknesses, and so forts and blockhouses were built around the Hoo peninsula and particularly at Chatham, some not being completed until after Waterloo. Batteries were built at Sandwich and Dungeness, a series of twenty-seven Martello towers hugged the coast from Folkestone down to Romney Marsh, and the 25-mile Royal Military Canal stretched from Hythe to Rye and Winchelsea with a military road running alongside it for moving troops rapidly to any desired point. Beacons were now inadequate for sending messages quickly from the coast to London and back, and a new semaphore system placed on the tops of hills was introduced. There were just nine stations positioned from Dover to Shooter's Hill covering the county from east to west and relaying a message in 2 minutes.

For as long as the threat of invasion lasted there were tented troops at Barham Downs, Coxheath and Brabourne Lees, and barracks at Chatham, Dover and Shorncliffe. At Canterbury several thousand soldiers were permanently housed in barracks from 1795, and by 1800 Ashford saw a substantial magazine and barracks housing 2,000 men, all of whom were engaged in building and maintaining the network of turnpike roads between that town and the Romney Marsh.

The county's architecture is distinctive, varied and often memorable, oasthouses being perhaps the quintessential Kentish buildings. The mediaeval heritage is substantial, with many attractive Tudor 'black and white' ensembles and individual houses, Wealden villages crammed with vernacular buildings as at Cranbrook and Tenterden, and larger

towns, Faversham and Sandwich chief among them, the latter probably the best-preserved small mediaeval town in England.

Proximity to London and increasing wealth in the eighteenth century saw the building of many fine new country houses, the architecture reflecting the taste and education of their owners, for example, at Bourne Park, Bradbourne, Finchcocks, Goodnestone next Wingham and Mereworth, the last-mentioned in the Palladian style, which would have been seen on the Grand Tour. Capability Brown's work is evidenced at Danson Park and Humphry Repton's at Cobham. At Tunbridge Wells the hand of Decimus Burton built the Calverley Park estate of nineteen villas and thereby established the classical style as suitable for smaller domestic architecture, leaving Gothic for larger schemes as seen, for example, at Hadlow Castle.

In common with the rest of the country, few post-mediaeval churches were built (Plaxtol of 1649 is a notable exception), although rebuilding occurred at Gravesend after a fire in 1727 and at Mereworth in 1744–6 to match the neighbouring castle. Daughter churches to cater for expanding populations may be seen at St Paul Deptford (1720–30) and St George Ramsgate (1824–7). There are rather more Non-conformist places of worship of this date, usually plain and vernacular, at Bessel's Green (Baptist, 1716), Maidstone (Unitarian, 1736) and Tenterden (Unitarian, 1746).

Other notable public buildings include almshouses at Canterbury, Dartford, Faversham and Sevenoaks; town halls at Faversham (1819), Maidstone (1764), Queenborough (1793) and Tenterden (1790); two-dozen union workhouses, that at Bridge exceptionally well preserved; and the splendid Theatre Royal at Margate (1787).

The history of the chief highways and of most roads between market towns from about 1700 to 1875 is to be found in the minutes, accounts, maps and other archives of the turnpike trusts. The extremely poor state of the road system before the age of the turnpikes, often exacerbated by wheeled traffic, meant that travel was generally only practicable between spring and autumn; such roads as there were in winter were simply not passable because of mud, flooding and broken surfaces, the deep ruts being filled up with anything to hand, which generally meant large unbroken stones awaiting wheeled traffic to break them down. From 1663 onwards interested people in a locality would seek an Act of Parliament to enable them to take over a portion of road, erect toll-gates

or turnpikes, appoint salaried officers and improve the road by drainage, bridge-building and straightening out of bends; professional surveyors and bands of labourers carried out all of this work. Turnpike- or gate-keepers were leased to the highest bidder. A General Turnpike Act of 1773 ushered in the golden age of road travel for the royal mail and stagecoaches until about 1840, when the railways brought a swift and almost complete change to the way in which the public travelled. Despite this progress, even in the early 1800s there were still few practicable roads for want of skilled labour rather than legislation.

The Watling Street road from London to Dover, major coach routes and leisure places such as Tunbridge Wells were the first to receive attention. Between 1709 and 1753 ten turnpike trusts were set up to extend accessibility to more places including the road from Canterbury to the sea at Whitstable and onwards to London, and at the same time fixing charges for use of the road by horses, sheep, carriages and so on. By the late 1700s Canterbury was losing the benefit of leisure traffic to the coastal towns because of cheap water transport and so the roads to the Thanet coastal towns and to Sandwich and Folkestone were all turnpiked. But in all, some two-thirds of all the county's turnpiked roads were in the west, reflecting the proximity of London and other transport hubs such as Chatham and Maidstone. By the mid-1800s the increase in road traffic was too great for the turnpike trusts to be able to cope with, and so Parliament introduced local highway boards, although these were more or less the same bodies with the same districts.

Passengers travelling to the Continent in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries generally sailed to and from Rye just over the county border in Sussex. Postal packets operated twice a week from Dover to both Calais and Ostend, and there were regular cross-Channel steamboat services from the 1820s. The South Eastern Railway linked its London trains to cross-Channel steamers in 1843–4, and from that date there were also regular sailings to both France and Belgium.

The fame of the commercially unsuccessful 1830 Whitstable–Canterbury railway line serves as a reminder that before 1850 the nearest town on the north coast with a train service was Gravesend. The main London–Redhill–Tonbridge–Ashford line, started in 1842, was constructed partly to pick up local Kent traffic, but also to secure the cross-Channel traffic passing through Dover; it was extended to Maidstone in 1844, to Tunbridge Wells in 1845 and through Canterbury

to Ramsgate and Margate in 1846, the main eastern hub being at Ashford. Prices were not cheap at 1*d*. a mile (the majority of people who walked to work were probably unaffected), and mass travel would have to await the introduction of cheap-day excursions. Later development was rapid, financed by the South Eastern and London, Chatham and Dover companies, and by 1914 very few places were more than 3 miles from a station, although of course today the network has shrunk greatly.

There were a number of consequences of the extensive network that later developed. Many of the coastal towns from Whitstable to Dover now provided family seaside holidays. In the west other places such as Greenhithe, Snodland, Stone and Swancombe saw rapid industrialization, and Crayford, Dartford, Erith and Sittingbourne also expanded greatly. Tramways began with a route from Greenwich to Peckham in 1871, and this soon becoming an important method of urban travel within metropolitan Kent and many of the principal coastal towns. During the 1860s the towns of Birchington, Tankerton and Westgate emerged, all railway creations founded on consumer demand. Canterbury Cathedral Archives (CCA) has a good collection of railway records, supplemented by a parish index, for 1835–1901 (CCA: CC-J).

The early watering places of Kent are justly famous. In 1606 Lord North discovered bubbling waters in a distant Weald valley, word of which soon reached London and there commenced a steady stream of visitors to the 'Tonbridge' wells. After the Restoration and its consequent building boom an extensive group of lodging houses, shops and coffee houses appeared, all maintained by a regular coach service which now brought the curious and wealthy down from London in 7 hours on the county's first turnpiked road. Houses were soon being built in several waves to accommodate the increasing numbers, especially after the railway arrived in 1845, amounting almost to a garden suburb with attendant fashionable squares and crescents.

Seaside resorts emerged as Tunbridge Wells' popularity peaked and developed as the spa town waned. Margate came first by two decades, Broadstairs, Deal and Ramsgate in 1754, Dover and Whitstable in 1768, Herne Bay in 1776 and Folkestone, Hythe and Gravesend (popular because of steamboats) by the end of the eighteenth century. Their success was based on the publicised medicinal benefits of sea water, transport developments and consumer demand; all of them offered bathing in sea water as well as the drinking of it, but little else not

available at the spa. Herne Bay was planned as a steamboat seaside resort but never got off the ground, as the scattering of Regency buildings shows today. Deal won fashionableness through its importance as a naval station and shipping port of call during the Napoleonic Wars. Hythe and Sandgate gained patronage from officers at Shorncliffe Barracks, an advantage also accorded to Folkestone.

But it was Thanet that gained the lion's share of visitors, and Margate that took the crown, several unique features including the earliest reference to seawater bathing (1736), the perfection of the bathing machine (1753) and the benefits of the Margate Sea Bathing Hospital (1796). Water communications with cheaper fares than road transport guaranteed visitor numbers which included the aristocracy, gentry and clergy, but also by the 1780s more humble members of society began to visit as the sailing packets could accommodate far greater numbers than coaches. It was not long before Margate's pier was built in 1824, to be followed by Deal, Gravesend, Herne Bay and Sheerness in the 1830s, and others a few decades later. In 1851, perhaps unsurprisingly, some 15 per cent of the county population resided in just nine seaside towns. A half-century later Folkestone, Margate and Ramsgate had significantly outgrown all the other resorts.

Restrictions on working hours from the 1840s and the introduction of bank holidays led to increased working class leisure, even if there were initially few theatres except in the resorts and at Canterbury, Chatham and Maidstone. Museums opened at Tunbridge Wells (1836), Dover (1849), Maidstone (1856) and Rochester (1892). The Victorian love of public amenities saw the widespread introduction of swimming baths, libraries, parks, golf courses and the like.

Public unrest was frequently at the mercy of bad harvests, the exporting of wheat in times of shortage and the wartime demands on grain stocks. The typical protest was a food riot, often preceded by grievances being nailed up in public. The Napoleonic Wars of 1793–1815 included severe shortages in 1795–6 and 1799–1801 which coincided with the threat of French invasion. As a consequence urban workers in Maidstone and the Medway towns went on strike because of rising prices and food shortages. Similar causes brought about rural unrest with attacks on mills and outbreaks of arson. The conclusion of war with France resulted in great economic and social distress. In 1830 the 'Swing' riots saw machine-breaking in east Kent, and wage-rioting and

the destruction of threshing machines by agricultural labourers widely across the rest of the county, all of which was soon to spread rapidly across southern and eastern England. Mob violence escalated and the military was deployed throughout the county to support local forces of law and order, often with harsh results.

Parishes were hard-pressed to quell such behaviour. Law enforcement lay in the hands of annually elected and unpaid borsholders or petty constables, some large parishes having a high constable in command of them. The borsholders were charged with raising hue and cries and enforcing laws against vagrancy and Sabbath infringements by serving warrants and bringing offenders before magistrates. In some urban areas night watchmen were appointed to similar positions, but they were few in number and often incapable of acting efficiently. By the later 1700s local property owners, despairing at the difficulty and expense of detection, arrest and prosecution, formed associations for the prosecution of felons, and some established their own police forces or patrols. As a result a rudimentary system of policing emerged, organised through the justices at borough and parish level. Punishments included fines, whipping and branding, and prisons were soon full of those awaiting sentencing or execution, together with many debtors.

Until 1831 public executions took place at Penenden Heath near Maidstone, and thereafter in front of Maidstone gaol. The earliest prisons and bridewells were at Canterbury, Dartford, Dover, Maidstone (records 1805–53 at Kent History and Library Centre (KHLC): PC/M) and Rochester, along with several prison hulks on the Thames housing convict labour and future transportees. By the mid-Victorian period there were fifteen county-wide lock-ups with parish constables from Dartford in the north-west to Hythe in the south-east. New county prisons were built at Canterbury in 1808 and at Maidstone in 1812–18. Police stations were commonly built after 1860, usually containing cells. Despite prison reform, there was widespread hard labour and harsh regimes, and little sign of the promised rehabilitation.

The Victorian census returns afford much information. The county population doubled between 1801 and 1851, although with great regional variations. Many parishes had more people in 1850 than in 1900, but in one-third of all parishes there were fewer people in 1900 than in 1850, the most noticeable losses being in the east because of

movement from countrysided to town, the seeking of work in the industrial Midlands and north or overseas emigration. Between 1801 and 1861 major towns such as Canterbury, Rochester and Maidstone doubled or trebled in size. Seaside towns generally doubled, with Folkestone and Ramsgate trebling. Industrial towns often trebled or quadrupled, notably Dartford, Gillingham, Gravesend, Sheerness and Sittingbourne. Dormitory and residential towns like Beckenham, Chislehurst and Sevenoaks showed lesser increases, although by 1921 they had all grown prodigiously.

But not everything is on such a scale, and much of the county still retains pristine countryside dotted with tiny villages, farms and churches. If you can trace your origins to such a place, then you may experience views and buildings hardly changed since your ancestors knew them and lived in them. Thanet is wide and open; the Elham Valley green and lush; the north-western marshes empty and windswept; the Wealden villages prosperous and mellow; Romney Marsh a world apart with churches, sheep and sky. And wherever you go Kent's quintessential orchards and farmland still grow hops, apples and cherries in profusion – Mr Pickwick would not be disappointed.

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