



This week's cover feature

Pretty Tenterden

Neil McAllister shares the history of this beautiful town in Kent.

Photographs by Neil McAllister.

If we look at the map, it's hard to believe that the landlocked Kent town of Tenterden was once an important port.

In the 1400s, when the River Rother connected it to the coast, it was a Cinque Port, granted duty-free trading status by King

Edward I in exchange for supplying ships and men to defend the country.

Back in those days, the port enjoyed a thriving trade in wool, whilst in the fine agricultural land around the town, fields not occupied by sheep were filled with apple and cherry orchards, and the famous hop fields supplying Britain's brewers.

When storms caused the river to silt up, the town became isolated from the English Channel, ten miles away. Smaller boats still carried on trade, but this was more informal, smuggling to avoid heavy duties on French brandy and wine.

Today Tenterden has a timeless charm, with its broad high street flanked by beautiful buildings, many of which are clad in white- or black-painted clapboard, whilst others have pretty tile-hung façades giving every view picture-postcard potential.

As well as being exceptionally pretty, the town is uncommonly friendly. Within five minutes

of parking up, we were wished good morning by three people, whilst a fourth, seeing me with my camera, stopped to point out some of Tenterden's most picturesque features.

"I moved here four years ago from near Sevenoaks," our new friend told us. "Everyone has made me feel very welcome. I walk the dog every day and within five minutes I am in gorgeous countryside."

As we chatted, I photographed a beautiful old house, framed on two sides by a bank of hollyhocks.

When the dog walker moved on, Hazel spotted a white ceramic cat, perched on the tiled roof, apparently stalking a pottery pigeon up near the ridge.

"Isn't it lovely," Hazel said, appreciating the property's unique character. "Can we live here?" She was delighted when I pointed out the nameplate, *Little Dane Court*, which brought a smile of recognition.

"It's where we're staying – what could be better!"

Factfile

■ Tenterden is the birthplace of many well-known people, including printing pioneer William Caxton and world-famous journalist and TV star David Frost.

■ In 1538 Henry VIII came to Tenterden, probably on his way to Smallhythe. His ship *The Grand Mistress* was built there in 1545.


■ Bodiam Castle has appeared in the movie "Monty Python And The Holy Grail", an episode of the TV show "Doctor Who", and a music video by Enya.

■ Sissinghurst Castle Garden has a diverse history. It was a prison in the 1700s, and once a home to the Women's Land Army.

As we dropped off our bags before exploring, Rod Hardingham, who created this unique guest-house a few years ago, smiled at mention of the cat.

"I was working in the front garden when an old chap apologised for knocking off the cat's tail with a catapult eighty-odd years ago! The current tail is a replacement. Tour buses often stop outside."

Whilst Tenterden's history



The old public water supply pump on the village green.