

# My Favourite History Place

Sackville College, East Grinstead

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Sackville College almshouse in East Grinstead, Sussex, was founded in 1609, by Robert Sackville, 2nd Earl of Dorset, when he wrote his will. He died 17 days later without seeing one stone laid, yet the College still stands, providing affordable accommodation for local elderly people of limited means. It is a Grade I listed building and stands as an architectural jewel at the end of a High Street that also boasts fifteenth-century and Tudor houses. The almshouse residents now have attractive flats with their own front door, kitchen, bedroom and bathroom, which are a far cry from the daily bucket of well water and communal privy enjoyed by their predecessors. The founder wanted his 'hospital' or 'college' to be called Sackville College, by which he meant a gathering of people for a common purpose, not a school. His son, Richard, 3rd Earl of Dorset, left vast debts, sold lands intended to endow the college and took ten years to build it, so its survival is remarkable.



When visitors enter the quadrangle, close to the busy High Street, children often say: 'Wow, this is old!' Visitors go to the common room, where residents used to cook food on two fires. You can see where they sharpened their knives on the stones surrounding the door. Here, 31 residents – 21 men, one of whom was to be the Warden, and ten women – were to live, pray, praise God, and receive £10 a year from Sackville funds. Strict rules included: no smoking, no swearing and no fighting. A box with three locks in the chapel received fines for such offences. Residents were to pray in the chapel twice daily. Visitors proceed past the well to the dining hall, entering through a doorway under the tower with an heraldic leopard aloft and a ducal coat of arms set in the wall. The Sackvilles descend from Herbrand de Sauqueville, who came to England after 1066. They married into other wealthy families. One married Margaret Boleyn, aunt of the more famous Anne, and this made the Sackvilles cousins of Elizabeth I, who trusted and employed them. They served subsequent monarchs and were dukes for five generations. The dining hall was part of the Dorset Lodgings, the grand wing used as a hunting lodge by the Sackvilles. By tradition, a spy window high in the wall enabled the ladies to keep an eye on the feasting, and wenching, going on below.



John Mason Neale, Warden 1846-66, lived in this wing with his wife and five children. He provided Sunday lunch for the residents every week, because some were so poor. The chapel, which Neale's friend William Butterfield restored, reflects more of Neale's story. He was a leading light in the Oxford Movement and embellished the chapel with pictures of saints and a cross on the Rood Screen. The Bishop of Chichester objected to such High Church practices and inhibited Neale from celebrating the Eucharist for 13 years.

Locals misunderstood Neale and once tried to set fire to his lodgings at the college. The window in Neale's study, a small room at the

heart of the college, looks towards Ashdown Forest. Here he wrote sermons, books, hymns and carols. 'Good King Wenceslas' is the most famous, first published in 1853. Ashdown Forest also inspired him to found the Society of St Margaret, a sisterhood of nuns who cared for the sick and poor. Neale died of tuberculosis, aged only 48.

The 400-year story of Sackville College contains universal themes. While the 4th earl fought for the king in the Civil War, some inmates of the college probably starved. Those walls have witnessed rich and poor staying within the same building, a devout father, a spendthrift son, a brilliant but misunderstood Warden, religious controversy, survival of the Civil War and world wars, constant shortage of funds, life, death, love, anger. Humour is recorded too, such as when Neale and a guest, checking the quadrangle late one night, laughed at the extraordinary sounds of the residents' snores. Today an air of tranquillity prevails. Neale rests in the

churchyard nearby while his vision, from 165 years ago, and Robert Sackville's bequest over 400 years ago, continue to help poorer people in a beautiful building that enhances the town and reflects so much history.

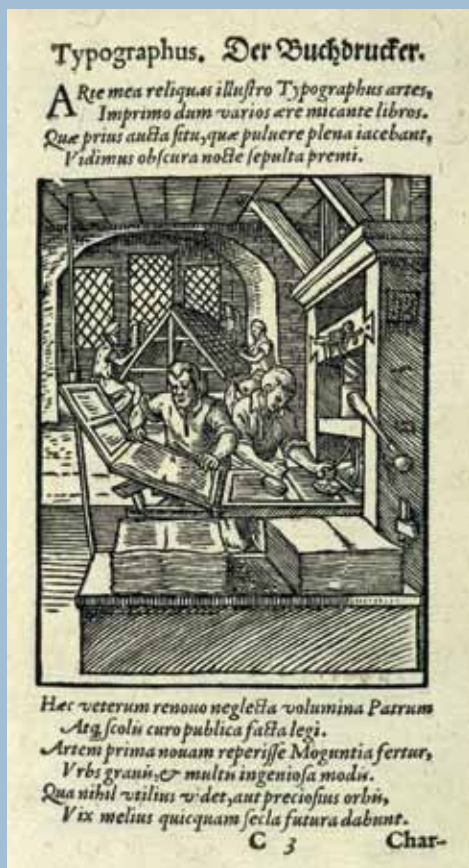
Sackville College is open to the public from mid-June to mid-September, between 2.00 and 5.00 p.m., from Wednesday to Sunday. Parties can be shown around by appointment, and with refreshments, at other times, by arrangement with the Almoner.

Please visit [www.sackvillecollege.com](http://www.sackvillecollege.com) for details. Caroline is one of the volunteer guides at Sackville College.

If you would like to tell us about your history place in a future edition of *The Historian*, in about 700 words, please email: [alf.wilkinson@history.org.uk](mailto:alf.wilkinson@history.org.uk)

# The printed word in ten tweets

To tie in with this edition of *The Historian* here is a slow but transformative historical occurrence – a history of the printed word.



Typographus. Der Buchdrucker (The Printer) 1568  
© The Trustees of the British Museum

Summarising an event or person using ten statements of only 140 characters (including spaces!). Compiled by Paula Kitching

-  618 to 906: T'ang Dynasty – the first printing is done in China using ink on carved wooden blocks to transfer an image on to paper.
-  Europeans first make paper in 1309, instead of using parchment. The Chinese and Egyptians had started making paper centuries before.
-  Around 1450 the German Johann Gutenberg invented the printing press, transforming the way that information could be produced.
-  In 1455, Gutenberg produced what is considered to be the first book ever printed: a Latin language Bible, printed in Mainz, Germany.
-  1476 William Caxton used the Gutenberg printing press in England; 1495 First papermill opened in England; 1611 King James Bible published.
-  The availability of books helped to spread both the Renaissance and the Reformation across Europe, transforming lives and minds.
-  The availability of books and pamphlets helped to drive the need for education and literacy. It also created a greater need for archives.
-  The spread of easy printing led to the introduction of newspapers, journalists, the popular novel and mass communication.
-  Through libraries, printed works became accessible to all, and their contents could change lives and bring revolution or condemnation.
-  'The printed word is now being replaced with the digital word making books and papers etc. obsolete' Discuss...

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