



February 2006

**Tadley and District History Society  
(TADS)**

Next meeting -

**Wednesday 15th February**

at St. Paul's Church Hall 8.00 to 9.30 pm

**“Occupied Jersey (1940 -1945)”**

**By Patricia Foster.**

The Channel Islands were the only part of Britain invaded and occupied by the Germans during WWII. The islands were not relieved until well after most of the rest of Europe, by which time life was in dire straights for all.

***(Everybody welcome - visitors £2.00)***

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**[www.tadshistory.com](http://www.tadshistory.com)**

## **TADS Meeting 15<sup>th</sup> March**

“Middle East Dance, History and Practice” by Sue Ealding

**Last month’s meeting** (18/1/06):

### **“William Cobbett, 1763 – 1835”**

by Chris. Hellier, Deputy Curator of Farnham Museum

More than 55 TADS members opened the new season with Chris Hellier’s talk on William Cobbett, perhaps programmed into thinking that Cobbett rode peacefully round rural England in the eighteenth century.

Not a bit of it! Cobbett was quite a lad with loads of energy and ideas from his bird-scaring days as a 3 year old, guarding his Dad’s peas, to beginning his famous rural rides as a 56 year-old in 1821. Actually his famous rides were to keep an eye on any Government changes, and not solely to admire our green and pleasant lands as a patriot.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century he would probably be regarded as a hyperactive over-confident egotist who seems to have driven his lady wife, Anne, to a near nervous breakdown. He was His Own Man, but an awkward one at that, demanding much of others while sometimes kicking over the traces himself. (He didn’t like smokers but smoked himself!)

Cobbett’s eventful life began with rural roots in Farnham, Surrey, at the Jolly Farmer Inn (now the William Cobbett Inn) where his Dad, George, was the publican plus farmer and surveyor. William and his 3 brothers helped to hoe, sow and reap and became strong and self-sufficient.

However, schooling didn’t feature large in William’s life and he apparently lived predominantly off ‘native wit’ throughout his life’s journey as a journalist, publisher, politician (Tory M.P. for Oldham, Lancs. at the age of 69 years), farmer, huntsman, hare-courser, bare-knuckle fighter, single stick fighter (no blood to win!), advocate, prisoner, bankrupt, historian, husband, father, foreign traveller, Radical and sympathiser of the poor -- and probably much, much more....

Every mother’s nightmare must be to send the kids out to work in the garden and have one, albeit 14 years old -- William decide suddenly to catch a passing stage-coach to Kew Gardens. Here he landed on his feet with a gardening job and lodgings. Sadly his green smock and red garters aroused the amusement and scorn of George IV’s princelings and because of this William had a bigoted lifelong grudge against the said King.

William lived in politically lively times in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century when the world turmoil involved the French revolution, the American War of Independence, the Industrial Revolution and agricultural changes.

Unbelievably he had some involvement in ALL of these events by trying and failing to join the Royal Navy in Portsmouth (1782), by mistakenly joining a marching regiment at Chatham and being posted to near the Canadian/American border area in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Here he thought his superiors were fools, charlatans and embezzlers. However William's forte was as a Tracker, ferreting out Army deserters from elusive places.

While in the army in Halifax, always a man of superlatives, he saw the most beautiful girl whom he knew would make the best wife -- and he trustingly gave her 150 guineas (£8000) to save for him. Luckily the girl was as honest as she was lovely, and she saved William's money -- so he married the perfect Anne but seems to have led her a merry dance in many places in Canada and U.S.A. as well as on farms in England.

During his life, so outspoken was William Cobbett that en route he fell foul of President George Washington, Chief Justice McKean, a Dr Rush (whom he accused of killing his patients) and Napoleon Bonaparte, not to mention numerous influential people back in England, like William Pitt, Canning etc.

His prickly newspaper, 'Peter Porcupine's Gazette' punctured his enemies' egos with its witty writing. In 1803 aged 40 years he annoyed the British Government.

In between bankruptcy and prison sentences in Newgate Prison (1810–1812) William was an influential, much loved and admired farmer in Botley (Hants) and Ash (Surrey). In 1821 he was the self-appointed champion and adviser to Queen Caroline the wife of his old adversary George IV. Gilbert White on horseback he was not. Between 1821 and 1830 he did some of his rural rides to check on England's inadequate government of Rotten Boroughs and absentee clergy etc. etc. etc.

That William Cobbett was a man of paradox and immense energy is unquestionable. He certainly survived all that life threw at him and even at death's door in 1835, was pushed round his Ash farm in a wheelbarrow to check on everything. His passing was much mourned (1835) and even today we remember what we think of his halcyon days of riding round rural England.

Thank you, Chris. for your fact-packed talk.

Rosemary Bond

## **What's On? Local events which may be of interest.**

**Basingstoke Archaeological and Historical Society** (*7.30 in Church Cottage, Basingstoke*)

9th March - Life and death aboard the Mary Rose

**Friends of the Willis Museum** (*meetings at 7.30pm in the museum*)

February 16th - The Newbury Coat.

March 16th - The work of Lord Mayor Treloar Trust

**Hampshire Record Office** 'Last Thursday' Lectures (*1.15-1.45pm*)

23 February - Who does he think he is? - The amazing story of the Tichborne Claimant

30 March - Following the Seagull - The Southern Television Years

**Milestones Museum** - 'The Afternoon Lecture'

28 February, at 2pm - Clocks and Watches of the Museum

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## **History in the making**

**Tadley, 30<sup>th</sup> November 2006.** Thieves made an early morning raid on Lloyds Bank using a digger stolen from Stacey's yard at Whitehouse Farm, Silchester Road. They did considerable damage to the building and stole two cash dispensers (ATMs) containing many thousands of pounds.

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**Errata Jan. Newsletter** - The new Treasurer is Jim Coles (with an 's')

A typing mistake made William Cobbett rather older than he was. He was born in 1763 not 1736.

**TADS** - Some definitions thrown up by an internet search engine:

*Text Adventure Development System*

*Target Aquisition Designation Sight*

*Treatment for Adolescents with Depression Study*

***TADS annual membership is £10 per person.***

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