



March 2006

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

**Next meeting -**

**Wednesday 15th March**

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

**“Middle East Dance, History and Practice”**

**by Sue Ealding**

**This form of dance is far more than the ‘belly dance’ of cabaret and has a history stretching back hundreds of years. It is now a popular form of exercise in Western countries.**

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The Bevin Boys (*Last month's meeting*)

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

## **TADS Meeting 19<sup>th</sup> April**

### **“Eye Surgery, afloat in Bangladesh”**

by Doctors Lynette and David Moss

**Last month's meeting** (15/2/06):

#### **‘The Bevin Boys’** by Morris Pearce

*(NB Morris very kindly gave this talk at very short notice because the ‘Occupied Jersey’ lecturer, Patricia Foster, sadly died unexpectedly in Jan. 2006)*

Easy option? Cowards? Conscientious objectors? Not a bit of it! For the Bevin Boys, coal miners extraordinaires, these young men were catapulted, often from World War II armed forces into a coal mine. By the way, that's ‘boys’ of Ernest Bevin, 1881 –1951, Minister of Labour under the wartime coalition Government.

Why were they miners instead of Marines, etc? Because the government of the day forgot to make coal mining a Reserved Occupation. Consequently the coal miners happily swapped the darkness and subterranean danger of mines for the munitions factories --- another Reserved Occupation, instead. So, by 1943 our war-torn, power- hungry country was down to its last THREE WEEKS of coal supplies.

Life's a lottery. Morry reckons that's so. As his National Registration Number ended in ‘0’ (Those with ‘9’ were also eligible) he was one of the 50,000 Bevin Boys to go into mines all over Britain. Luckily he's survived unscathed.

After a hasty month's training, this lad from the green fields and Hampshire Downs of Kingsclere ended up under Doncaster in South Yorkshire's Askern Training Pit. Morry was trained by the admired and revered father-figure, Albert Chambers who turned out to be a mining teacher of great skill and patience.

Mining has always been dangerous. Still is. Between 1943 and 1947 (yes they kept the lads an extra 2 years after the war ended), Morry's group of Bevin Boys worked over 2000 feet down, producing countless tons of coal, but with many deaths and injuries in conditions of black dusty, stifling hot or freezing cold by turn, cramped claustrophobia, with the threat of high-level methane gas or low-down firedamp gas. They were hewing and

hauling coal from under Doncaster. Tragically Morry's mentor, Albert Chambers was instantly killed one day by a steel hoop support. These could snap without warning whereas the old fashioned wooden ones would creak loudly for a while first.

Normally pit cages rise or drop very swiftly, but if there's been an accident the 12-bell ring means raise this cage with great caution and respect.

There were 44 pit ponies at Bentley Colliery, lovingly tended by the miners. The ponies had 2 weeks' holiday per year to frolic in the freedom of Yorkshire's green parts before returning to their subterranean stables. (Happily ponies have not been used in the U.K. since the 1960s).

As a Catch-Knocker, Morry had to be crafty and quick to stay alive, with 6 tons of coal in little tubs on a narrow gauge railway all too near him every 60 seconds. The miners favoured wooden pit props because wood 'talks' and creaks to you and you get a feel for its stresses. Steel props just snap at the joints and everything crashes down and crushes you. Apparently the whole mine 'moves' and lives and breathes 2000 feet underground, we 60 plus T.A.D.S.' members discovered.

Morry seems to have been an all-about Bevin Boy and nothing stressed him, whether it was cycling to his pit; motorcycling over a boardwalk with a 4 foot flood underneath; or eying up the lovely, local lass who was to eventually become his wife: young Sylvia, now happily wed to him for nearly 58 years.

Morry has an eye also for what is right. As with a few other worthies of W.W.II, the Bevin Boys didn't get proper recognition for many years: 60 years in fact! No medals, but a badge for the boys (soon). And an annual march to the Cenotaph wearing white miners' helmets and carrying a proud green flag and friendship all round. Lady Elizabeth Finsberg and Lord Roy Mason make sure these Boys are not the forgotten conscripts.

However, I think Morry is a character to be reckoned with and he keeps alive the Bevin Boys' Association by e-mail, lectures and visits. Any more Bevin Boys out there? Thank you, Morry, for your spirited enthusiasm for what you feel is just and proper.

Morry's e-mail is: [morry.pearce @ tiscali.co.uk](mailto:morry.pearce@tiscali.co.uk)

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P.S. As a result of Morry's lecture one more Bevin Boy has come out of the woodwork: Freddie Woodruff of North Bristol!

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

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

13th April - Recent Archaeological work at Kingsclere

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

16th March - The work of Lord Mayor Treloar Trust

20th April - The Ancient Sacred Sites of Wessex

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

30th March - Following the Seagull - The Southern Television Years

27th April - Looking for lost houses: some Hampshire examples

### **Willis Museum Exhibition**

18th March to 29th April - Hidden House History. Objects deliberately hidden in houses.

**Silchester Roman Weekend** - 8th & 9th April in the Old House field off Bramley Road. Starting at 10.30am there will be continuous displays of Military and Civilian Life. Adults £3, Children £2.

**40th Anniversary of St Paul's Church, Tadley** - A Celebration  
Thanksgiving Service addressed by the Bishop of Winchester at 10.30am, 2nd April.

**Discover Hampshire** - is a guide to 160 great days out in Hampshire and contains some discount vouchers. It is available by e-mailing:

[hampshire@responseuk.co.uk](mailto:hampshire@responseuk.co.uk) or telephoning 0800 093 8930.

## **History in the making**

### **Tadley, February 2006.**

The garage, 'Smiths of Baughurst' has been demolished and the site cleared for housing development.

The 'Fighting Cocks' public house has closed and is boarded up. An application has been made to convert it into 3 dwellings and build 8 houses in the grounds.

*TADS annual membership is £10 per person.  
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