



November 2007

**Tadley and District History Society
(TADS) - www.tadshistory.com**

**Next meeting - Wednesday 21st November
at St. Paul's Church Hall, 8.00 to 9.30 pm**

**‘The Watercress Line,
the Mid-Hants Railway’**

By Dave Yaldren, Talks Organiser

(Everybody welcome - visitors £2.00)

Programme Organiser - Derek Heath has reluctantly and with much trepidation agreed to take on this job for the coming year.

He has done so because he didn't want to see want to see the Society come to an end for the lack of one worker.

As Derek is only a year younger than Bob Brown it cannot be seen as a long term solution. - The Editor

*Comments, queries and suggestions to Bob Brown, Tadley (0118) 981 6109,
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www.tadshistory.com

TADS Meeting 20th December 2007: ' AGM & Social Evening '

Last month's meeting (17/10/07)

A Barrel Organ Bonanza

By Keith Hilson and Richard Kerridge, local Collectors Extraordinaire

The Barrel organ: ancient or modern? The in-sound or off-limits? Cherished or reviled? Sweet or harsh sounds? As with any fashion the barrel organ's fortunes have fluctuated. Produced in ancient Egyptian and Roman times for war cry purposes, the poor barrel organ probably sounded like a Maori Haka whoop, with a fierce noise produced by water and bellows to frighten enemies.

Keith obviously has had barrel organs in his blood since the age of 6 when he bought his first with money left him by his Grandma. His co-showman, Richard, is now barrel organ mad too. It seems to be their life to get melodious sounds from a hedgehog-type pin and barrel device housed in some bits of wood.

In the 21st Century you can name your price for a barrel organ and then add noughts and try and get insurance. However, in 1960 London's not always properly tuned street barrel organs were silenced because they drove away shoppers. Once a war toy, now a rich man's toy (21st century), but unloved by some in the last century.

In the 13th & 14th Centuries only the nobility and wealthy knew exactly what time of day it was – the rest probably guessed. In the 1700s, time boys rang church bells (Lewes, East Sussex).

Why not mechanise all this? So the world went from mechanised bells to barrel organs and on to Carillons. Venice had the best carillon (1497). Gradually barrel organs became refined musical instruments, but still only for the rich. The butler turned the handle of the pin barrel organ for music specially composed by Mozart, Beethoven and Haydn. Not many rich people could actually play a musical instrument then.

Ever clever, the Swiss, Germans (Black Forest area) French and English tried street music for the poor. In London's Soho, portable barrel

organs 3 feet by 18 inches (a metre by a half metre) entertained people on the streets.

Even cleverer, the Swiss refined the barrel organ even more, with steel pins on a spongy poplar wood barrel pinging tuned steel teeth as the barrel was turned. Then they made clockwork musical boxes, which were surprisingly cheap and not very cheerful. Keith and Richard told us bigger barrel organs were often plonked into second hand furniture, e.g. a wardrobe, and carted around London.

Nicol Frere had made good barrel organs in the 1890s. They were busked around London's streets where a hasty hymn could be played on a Sunday to legalise the whole thing if The Authorities popped up!

American barrel organs weren't considered as good as European ones (1892). They used thick reeds for the low notes, thin ones for high. If you had a broken pin you missed a note --- so barrel organs were, and are, carefully cared for.

What did barrel organs do for us in the 19th Century? They were used for busking, drawing a crowd, advertising a circus, fairground or silent film, and in 1953 one was used at the Queen's Coronation. We, nearly 50 TADS, were happy to see this portable ex-wardrobe (1912) handsomely converted and distinctively painted in black and gold by Tadley's very own late-lamented Jimmy Williams. Keith and Richard played it robustly and we sang to it tonight --- the full complement of 11 traditional songs of yesteryear from 'Daisy Daisy' to 'Run Rabbit, Run--'

What about the organ grinder's monkey? Monkeys were bought in threes in the 1890s. One to work and two to be moody! Monkeys could be trained to beg, borrow and enter houses to pester for money when released from the monkey seat chain.

Thank you, Keith and Richard, for your happy, lusty sing-along barrel organ bonanza. It was truly heart-uplifting, living history.

Rosemary Bond

TADS News

Last Saturday morning was spent sorting the Society's archives, which are stored in the Community Centre.

(Continued)

David Day is looking into organising a trip to the Tutankhamun exhibition in February. Cost will be about £35 per person.

The Project Group are very busy doing a new and illustrated version of the Florence Davidson History of Tadley.

Does anybody know when the last pint was served at the Fighting Cocks? Please tell Carol Stevens if you remember.

What's On? Events which may be of interest.

Hampshire Record Office *(Thursday lunchtime events 1.15-1.45pm)*

22 Nov - **Conan Doyle speaks**

29 Nov - **I am a man & brother** - Hampshire and the Slave Trade

6 Dec - **Calling all Drivers** - motoring films

13 Dec - **The Parish Pump** - Parish magazines for local and family history.

NB - Due to building work this programme may be disrupted. Before travelling to Winchester check on tel. no. 01962846154.

Willis Museum exhibitions

Until 24 Dec 2007 - **The Curious Case of the Tichborne Claimant.**

Milestones Museum

1 Dec to 1 Jan **Shell Wildlife Photographer of the Year** Exhibition 2006

From vivid, colourful landscapes to intimate portraits of animal behaviour, this exhibition offers an extraordinary insight into the beauty, drama and diversity of the natural world. On loan from the Natural History Museum.

History in the making

27th October 2007 - N David Stacey of Baughurst died age 69. David was a principal director of John Stacey & Sons Limited and a son of the founder.

He was a former Town Councillor and did a great deal for sport in the area, including donating land for the new Barlow's Park football complex.

*TADS annual membership is £10 per person.
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