

February 2008



**Tadley and District History Society  
(TADS) - [www.tadshistory.com](http://www.tadshistory.com)**

**Next meeting - Wednesday 20th January  
at St. Paul's Church Hall, 8.00 to 9.30 pm**

# **Down Memory Lane**

**A film show presented by**

**Geoff Wheeler**

*(Everybody welcome - visitors £2.00)*

**Membership subscriptions** of £10 per person are now overdue from many members. If paying at the coming meeting, will you please put your money (cheque or cash) in a sealed envelope with your name and address and the amount written on the outside, and hand it to the Treasurer.

*(A secondhand envelope will save writing the address).*

*Comments, queries and suggestions to Bob Brown, Tadley (0118) 981 6109,  
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**[www.tadshistory.com](http://www.tadshistory.com)**

**TADS Meeting 19th March 2008:  
Death & Disease in Medieval London  
By John Lloyd**

**Last month's meeting (16/1/08)**

**Frank Hornby – the man who made Meccano,  
Hornby Trains & Dinky Toys  
A talk by John Holland, Willis Museum, Basingstoke**

Frank Hornby (1863 -1936) was a Lime Street Station area Liverpoolian who brought, and brings, a lot of joy to 'young people' then and now.

We are actually talking 'young people' of yesteryear, although PICTURES showed predominantly boys playing with these educational toys! Most of the 55 strong TADS' audience eagerly hung on to every nut and bolt, tin strip and copper component gem, on Meccano, Hornby train sets and Dinky toys.

Someone said if Great Britain had given 'free Meccano Not Milk' to schoolchildren we would have retained our worldwide engineering prowess.

Queen Elizabeth II was a Meccano girl but Philip was a Hornby train set man. Naturally our lecturer, John, has a Hornby train set, complete with BOXES.

0 or 00 gauge – that is the question.

Frank Hornby, the seventh child of eight, was a man of paradoxes it seems. He wasn't fussed about schooling but liked maths, reading, self-help books and the philosophy of the self-help French potter, Bernard Palissy of 400 years ago, whose tenacity for glazing china correctly was obsessive. Palissy burned every stick of furniture and annoyed his wife, but eventually taught the world to GLAZE china correctly. Frank applied Palissy's tenacity to getting-it-right to toy manufacture. He also geared his family for world-wide business acumen by encompassing many languages from Mandarin to German; and simultaneously was cultured, musical, needed recognition, was rather scheming, smartly dressed, a life-long Christian, helped charities, was a devoted family man to his wife Clara

(1860 – 1953) and sons Roland (1889 – 1965) and Douglas (1890 - 1950). Sadly his daughter died young, which influenced his life and he was ever benevolent to his many factory employees.

Beginning his working life as a cloth-cap cashier, his then boss, David Elliot, guided the young Frank through a maze of business plans and disasters and in 1901 ‘Mechanics Made Easy’ was marketed. Not until 1907 the theatrical, sassy name, Meccano, was given to the educational engineering-type boxed toy. It contained metal strips ½ inch wide and 12 inches long (approx. 1.5 by 30 cm) with drilled holes which became a must-have for the well-heeled child of the day (1936) with his/her pipe-smoking papa in attendance.

Prices were always charged in shillings (5p); 7 shillings and 6 pence (37.5 p): up to 127 shillings (several hundred pounds today), but this excluded poor children and poor papas. Red and green Meccano strips were considered superior to blue and gold --- ‘effeminate’ and caused playground fights!

Hornby train sets flowed from the self-made millionaire’s factory in 1920 and were considered superior to German made toy trains even after W.W.I. The little locomotives were originally Meccano-esque and didn’t catch on. John said enough toy rail-track was made annually to stretch from Tadley to Edinburgh!

1934 saw toy figures made for Hornby trainset layouts and so also the superior Dinky toy was born: cars, lorries, dolls’ houses, boats, etc. etc.

In the 1960s Triang toys bought-out Frank Hornby’s toy concerns. And you have guessed where it’s all made now: China.

Frank Hornby gave, and is giving, much pleasure to young and old and the word ‘Meccano’ is in the O.E.D. in its own right. It just remains for the Hornby family dream to be realised: a Hornby Heritage Centre, no doubt in Liverpool.

Thank you John for your finely-detailed talk and wry humour. It made many not-so-young hearts pound again!

Rosemary Bond

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## History in the Making

Tadley - Giles Court Post Office closed on Thursday Feb14th 2008 at 1.00 pm. This was officially Tadley Post Office and continued on from the old one in Main Road, opposite Fairlawn Road and its predecessor.

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

### **Hampshire Record Office**

Exhibition - **Quills to keyboards:** the changing face of record keeping from Alfred the Great to the present day

*The Record Office are now holding lunchtime lectures every Thursday from 1.15-1.45pm). For Information see [www3.hants.gov.uk/whatson-hro](http://www3.hants.gov.uk/whatson-hro) or ring 01962846154.*

### **Willis Museum exhibitions**

Until 1st April **Cutting Edge - a History of Human Hair.** What is hair made from? What lives in it? What would you look like with a beard?

### **Milestones Museum**

Until 20th April - **Eating Creepy Crawlies.** A special exhibition which delves into entomophagy, the consumption of bugs and mini-beasts. Discover some of the nutritional benefits and flavours of this alternative food source. (On loan from the Natural History Museum).

### **B'stoke Archaeological & Historical Society** (7.30pm in Church Cottage)

13th march - **Recent excavations** at the Henge and Stone circles at Broomend of Crichtie, Scotland by Amanda Clarke of Reading University.

### **Friends of the Willis Museum**

21st Feb - **The Watercress Line**, by David Yaldren

20th March - **Nepal & the Gurkas** by Major Gerald Davies

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## **Newsletter Distribution**

The newsletter is distributed as paper copies or sent via email. Email is quick and costs the Society nothing in time or money. It also comes with the occasional pictures in colour and usually extra pictures are sent with it. If you would like to have the email version please send an email to:

[richard@ilexind.plus.com](mailto:richard@ilexind.plus.com).

*TADS annual membership is £10 per person.  
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