

October 2008



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

**Next meeting - Wednesday 15th October
at St. Paul's Church Hall, 8.00 to 9.30 pm**

Historic Syria

by

Richard Brown

TADS Committee member

(This is a late change from the programmed talk)

(Everybody welcome - visitors £2.00)

Newsletter Distribution - A big thank you to Valerie Gilbert who, aided by husband David, has volunteered to take on this task in response to the plea in last month's newsletter.

Visit co-ordinator - Due to pressure of work David Day needs to step down and we will need a replacement. See page 3 for his new visit.

*Comments, queries and suggestions to Bob Brown, Tadley (0118) 981 6109,
or Richard Brown (0118) 9700100, e-mail: richard@ilexind.plus.com*

www.tadshistory.com

**TADS Meeting 19th November 2008:
'Basinglog Morris'**

**Freeman's War - Experiences in World War II,
by Alan Freeman,
Captain, Royal Engineers Rtd.**

What a wonderful pedigree Captain Alan Freeman has. His Cambridge degree was interrupted by World War II and he completed it after the war with a £400 scholarship. 'Mega-bucks' in 1946. He must have been a very energetic and go-ahead engineer.

To 'engineer' means to design or construct something, (14th Century French) and in Latin it means to be 'ingenious'

Captain Freeman showed us some interesting slides from all over Europe, taken during the war where he and his Sappers in the Royal Engineers were responsible for making quickly-assembled bridges from what looked like Meccano kits to some of the uninitiated!

Incidentally, sappers were engineer soldiers who made 'saps' ('Sape' is 16th century French) as well, which meant they dug hidden trenches from which to attack enemy positions. Now Sappers also do bridge construction, as directed by officers like Captain Freeman.

Possibly one of the most well-known quick-bridges is the Bailey bridge. They are still used today in places like Kosovo and Iraq and are not always replaced by so-called elegant-looking bridges. There's one over the River Enborne in Brimpton, for example.

Sir Donald Coleman Bailey, 1901 – 1986, knighted in 1946 for his war effort, first 'doodled' his bridge on the back of an envelope. His boyhood hobby was bridge-building from wooden bits and string. He was very modest about his bridges but Monty of Alamein said 'without the Bailey bridge we should not have won the war....'

This marvellous bridge was built from lightweight pre-fabricated sections of steel which were interchangeable and secured with steel pins. A bridge could be assembled without complicated equipment in dangerous war zones. Captain Freeman showed us frightening pictures of brutally bombed bridges in Italy. Then 'hey presto!' in about 3 days your assembled

Bailey bridge was carrying troops, tanks and guns over rivers and gorges. They also used them during the Allied landings in coastal Normandy.

Captain Freeman showed terrifying pictures of the Italian bloodbath at Monte Casino, in 1944. He said the British were fighting northwards from southern Italy towards Rome. We were on the East side, and the Americans were on the West. It appears relations were not always harmonious!

The Battle of Monte Casino took 4 months and possibly left 250,000 dead or wounded. Captain Freeman said it was one of the toughest battles of the war because of the ‘seemingly unending succession of mountain ranges, ravines and rivers of the Italian terrain’. It demanded soldierly qualities of fighting, valour and endurance unsurpassed in any theatre of World War II....’ As well as British and American soldiers there were French, Indians, Ghurkhas, New Zealanders, Canadians and Poles.

Captain Freeman, other officers and sappers battled to re-build bridges and to save airmen from crashed aircraft in the very treacherous terrain. Once he was able relax with friends and go horse riding, shooting, and sunbathing at the pad of Countess Zeppelin (widow of the Airship maker) in the Venice area.

Although the Allies won the Battle of Monte Casino the question is still asked. Did bombing the monastery help?

Captain Freeman, who cycled to Queen Mary’s School, Basingstoke as a boy, was obviously a master builder of bridges, be they single, double or triple-decker cantilever. He is our truly local boy made good, and he naturally has the Italian Monte Casino medal, which he proudly worn to show us.

Thank you, Captain Freeman, for your tales of awful War exploits which many of your 45-strong TADS audience were glad to have missed.

Rosemary Bond

TADS Visit to ‘A Victorian Festival of Christmas’

at Portsmouth Naval Dockyard on Saturday 29th November. Book transport with David Day for £10. Pay your own entry on the day, eg. £10 for OAPs, which includes access to the Historic Ships, or you could visit Portsmouth City and quays.

Telephone David on 9700909 or book at Wednesday evening’s meeting.

(NB The event is also runs on Friday and Sunday for independent travellers).

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

Hampshire Record Office

On-Going Exhibitions at the HRO

Digging through the Archives: A botanical journey round the county

Reflections on the 90th anniversary of the First World War, including images from postcards, letters and diaries

Access Hampshire Heritage exhibition: How to make a start on local history research

The Record Office are now holding lunchtime lectures every Thursday from 1.15-1.45pm and many other events.

For Information see www3.hants.gov.uk/whatson-hro or ring 01962846154.

Milestones Museum The Museum has several on-going exhibitions with one on the Titanic liner starting on 25th Oct.

Willis Museum - *The Museum will be closed from 29 Sept to the beginning of December for a £560,000 revamp.*

B'stoke Arch' & History Soc. (19:30 at Church Cottage, Church Square,) 13th Nov - Early Christian Churches and Mosaics at Aquileia, Ravenna and Venice by Tony King, University of Winchester

Hearing loop - The Committee are considering funding a hearing loop for use during talks in the Hall. We would like to know how many people would benefit from such a facility. Please speak to Bob or Derek.

The 1907 "100 year ago" from the Hants and Berks Gazette is now in Tadley Library. Derek Ward holds the master copy if any member wishes to borrow it.

Tadley CAB have a fund raising Quiz Night at the Ambrose Allen Centre on Sat 18th October. Teams are needed (6 maximum). Entry is £8 per head which includes a Ploughman's super and a pudding.

*TADS annual membership is £10 per person.
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