

November 2008



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

**Next meeting - Wednesday 19th November
at St. Paul's Church Hall, 8.00 to 9.30 pm**

Basingclog Morris

History and demonstration of rural dance

with audience participation!!!

(Everybody welcome - visitors £2.00)

TADS visit to 'A Victorian Festival of Christmas'

at Portsmouth Naval Dockyard on Saturday 29th November leaving at 9.30am. David Day has 5 seats left. Transport only 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.

*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 17th December 2008:

TADS Annual General Meeting and Social

Last month's meeting (15/10/08)

Historic Syria by Richard Brown

The October talk was to be given by James Crosby-Dawson, chairman of the Hampshire branch of the NFU. Unfortunately he was unable to come along, and so TADS committee member Richard Brown ably assisted by wife Jane, gave us a talk about a visit they made to Syria. It was accompanied by an excellent slide show

Our normal scribe could not make this meeting, so my arm was twisted. Apologies for my inability to emulate Rosie Bonds' unique style.

For members like me Richard began by explaining just where Syria is. To the north is Turkey, to the east is Iraq, to the south are Jordan and the locally nameless Israel, to the west Lebanon and the Mediterranean Sea. The population is some 13 million.

Last May they flew to Damascus (spelt Dimashq on my map!) the capital city. A 7000 year old city, but very modern in parts, complete with traffic jams, slums, exotic shops (selling carpets, silk and shoes) and the Great Mosque in the middle. There are some very elegant old houses, and every-where are elaborate Arabic decorations. It is, of course, a Muslim country.

During 6,400 years of history some 34 civilization are listed as being in Syria, so some evidence of all of these has been left behind. Damascus has an official population of 3 million, but is thought to be nearer 5 million! There is a very formidable city wall.

The Great Mosque had been had been a Roman temple and then a Christian cathedral, which explains its strange shape. The remains of St John the Baptist are in the mosque and are venerated by the Moslems.

Well to the SW of Damascus is a vast cereal growing area and the ancient city of Bosra. This city has extensive Roman and other remains built of hard basaltic rock. The Roman water cistern held a three-year water reserve and the Roman theatre seated 15,000 people. (Did lager louts roam the streets after the entertainment?)

There was always the odd very civilized and welcome coffee stop in the middle of nowhere.

Next came Palmyra, 140 miles north-east of Damascus, situated in an oasis, a trading post, with some wonderfully decorated architecture. There was a huge square and the central temple of Baal had some amazing and very high columns (just how did the Romans make and erect these columns? I'm sure there must be learned books explaining it, but no B&Q and no power tools. Could we still manage to make them and put them up?) Many of the columns were fallen and broken, but many were still standing. Then on to Saladin's castle of the Crusader era, how did they dig a moat 90ft deep in solid rock?

Now to the ancient ruins of Ugarit. Richard and Jane visited the Phoenician Royal Palace of 1300BC. (Did they have tea there I wonder?) It seems the first written alphabet was found there.

The great castle of Crac de Chevaliers is amazing, imposing, and remarkably intact. It has a moat, massive vaults, and dominates a fork in a valley. Even Saladin by-passed it as being impregnable.

Lastly a convent church dating from 325AD and still in use. The Moslems in Syria tolerate other religions.

The trouble with Richard's presentation was that one tends to run out of words to convey the majesty and scale of some of the very old artefacts our predecessors left to us. We must never lose our appreciation of their efforts.

Chairman Bob Brown thanked Richard and Jane for their presentation, especially at such short notice

Derek Heath

An odd coffee stop in the Syria desert



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

Hampshire Record Office

On-Going Exhibitions at the HRO

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

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

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 including one on the **Titanic** liner.

Weekends until Christmas will feature an **Edwardian Christmas**.

20 Nov at 7:30pm - '**The History of England in Pub Signs**' by Gerald Gregory. Presented by the Friends of the Willis. Non-members £2.

Willis Museum - *The Museum is closed for refurbishment until 6th December.*

B'stoke Arch' & History Soc. (19:30 at Church Cottage, Church Square,)

8th Jan. - **Soft Curves and Full Figures:** Images of Women in the Old Stone Age by Dr Jill Cook - British Museum

History in the Making

Tadley - on the 27th November the new Burnham Copse Primary School will be officially opened by HRH the Earl of Wessex.

Hearing loop - 3 people expressed interest in having a loop available at meetings. Is there anyone else? Please speak to Bob or Derek.

*TADS annual membership is £10 per person.
Correspondence to Tadley and District History Society,
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