

February 2009



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

**Next meeting - Wednesday 18th February  
at St. Paul's Church Hall, 8.00 to 9.30 pm**

## **The story of Southwark**

**by Sally Botwright**

**London Blue Badge Guide**

*(Everybody welcome - visitors £2.00)*

**Membership subscriptions** - The majority of members have rejoined. If you are among those who have still to pay, the Treasurer will be very happy to take your £10 per person. 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,  
or Richard Brown (0118) 9700100, e-mail: [richard@ilexind.plus.com](mailto:richard@ilexind.plus.com)*

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## **TADS Meeting 18th March 2009:**

### **‘Jack of Newbury.’**

*by Dr David Peacock*

**Last meeting 21/1/09)**

## **The Great Western Railway comes to the Thames Valley**

**By John Chapman**

Not In My Back Yard (NIMBY). Can we believe that a 19<sup>th</sup> century person should try and prevent God’s Wonderful Railway (GWR.) from penetrating the countryside and lush country estates between London and Bristol? Yes! And the railway on its way to New York, no less (obviously by ship!) Yes.

Man’s been on this earth for millennia, but NIMBY is alive and well (even considering Heathrow Airport’s 3<sup>rd</sup> runway controversy this month). It’s impossible to think anyone could object to the evocatively-named Great Western Railway. But they did. Every trick in the then-book was tried, to prevent this railway from which the Great Western Company in 1824 sought to drag the communications business from slow to quicker travel – and even from functioning.

Take canal barges at 2 mph; 6 to 8 and even as many as 18 horses pulling cumbersome road trains with wooden wheels along muddy or snowy, or flooded roads at 1/2 mph; stage coaches at 12 mph. If you really wanted to MOVE, a racehorse travels at 25 – 30 mph!

Everyone shilly-shallied about for years between approximately 1824 & 1835 and Dr Dionysius Lardner even produced a paper stating that anyone travelling at 25 mph would suffocate and die! The Reading Mercury newspaper was ‘for’ the railway, the Berkshire Chronicle ‘against.’

Along came young, charismatic but small (5 feet one inch), stove-pipe hatted, cigar-smoking Isambard Kingdom Brunel (1806 -1859), who

was a brilliant engineer. Most engineers then were a big, brute force to be reckoned with. Brunel was not. However, he wowed everyone by obtaining Royal Assent, (1835) from our Hanoverian King William IV (who reigned 1830-1837).

The GWR was built in 2½ years. Brunel planned and schemed very cleverly and obviously inspired his Irish navvies and the riff-raff, (15<sup>th</sup> century French meaning worthless rabble, Oxford Dictionary) to work incredibly hard. Mechanical diggers were very rare in 1835, but between them all, the hills were levelled for the railway line and the dips were in-filled, rivers were bridged and the Thames Valley marshes avoided where possible. These vast groups of men, horses and mules created what is still considered to be the most level line in Britain, working from London's Paddington westwards via Ealing, Slough, Maidenhead/Taplow, Twyford, Reading, Purley, Pangbourne, Didcot, Swindon and on to Bristol. Branch lines were added to Hungerford and Oxford later, after much more NIMBY-ing.

Brunel insisted on very, very deep railway cuttings to obtain a suitable level for locomotives to run well. Horses or mules and carts moved the spoil etc. and there were barrow runs. A barrow run has a plank running 50 feet upwards and outwards from a cutting and a very skilled barrow-man guiding the heavy spoil-filled barrow up the plank behind a horse tied to a pulley rope, which would then be emptied over the top and out of the way. Hey presto...spoil gone. So successful was this idea of Brunel's that it was exported to the French who had been using panniers on pack horses to remove spoil. This system was also used in North and South America.. John said it was the best....

Brunel was a splendid 'static' (civil) engineer, but not so hot with 'dynamic' (mechanical) stuff. His locomotives were not tremendous. His ships though, were later pretty successful (S.S. Great Britain, Bristol). His stations and bridges were brilliant. Then along came Daniel Gooch (1816-1889) who was later knighted. He is considered to have been an excellent mechanical engineer who put the 'GREAT' into GWR. His Firefly locomotive, (1840) was very speedy if somewhat fresh-air surrounded, and he built it at the tender age of 24 years. Firefly sped along at 65 mph and no one died of suffocation...

Snobbery as well as NIMBY thrived in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Nothing changes. The rolling stock 'carriages', for most passengers had no windows, or glass-less windows, rough wooden boards to sit on with just 18 inches (1/2 metre) height of boards to stop you falling out of the train in your

surround-weather state. Third class 'goods' trains ran for poor passengers at 2am so that the gentry did not have to set eyes on the common man and riff-raff .. Horses in horse-boxes, (1845-1850) could travel better than people. Railway line gauges, 7ft or 7ft & 1/4 inch, wooden railway piles and then wooden sleepers, not to mention signalling, were all a bit haphazard. Line gauges were later standardised. The then-signalman and his dog gesticulated to indicate train movements. And then Brunel had a brilliant idea of disc-and-crossbar signalling: Bar for 'stop' & Disc for 'go'.

Eventually Queen Victoria happily embarked in a Royal Railway Carriage, probably lessening assassination attempts on her.

Poor Brunel! He was sacked in 1855 when the GWR nearly went bankrupt. He turned to ship building, but what with too much smoking and overwork, he died young at 53. Sir Daniel Gooch, the loco-engineer became the wealthy Chairman of the G.W.R. in 1865, also branching out into submarine cable laying.

The Squire of the Manor of Purley was very much against the railway, but was presented with a gold token allowing him lifelong free travel. He flatly refused it. When he died in 1901, his horse-drawn bier had to travel over the river bridge and a nearby train sounded a blast from its whistle. The horse bolted causing the deceased to arrive in double quick time at the cemetery!

One last thing. Why do the British have Proper Railway Platforms? John said it is because we do it better than anyone else in the world!

Thank you John, you of English spirit and pride, diverse interests and many skills and hobbies, for your detailed talk to 74 TADS members and guests. We must all be remembering that the GWR was born in about 1840 ..... only about 100 years before we were.

Rosemary Bond

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## **Help wanted with Oral History**

Barbara Applin of the Basingstoke Archaeological and History Society is looking for people who can tell her of their experiences as Mid-wives or young mothers.

If you can help please contact Barbara on 01256 465439 or email: [barbara.applin@btinternet.com](mailto:barbara.applin@btinternet.com)

## **Obituary - George Stanley 24.6.1923 - 20.1.2009 (85 years)**

George and his wife Iris joined TADS at its start in 1984 and had been elected Honorary Members of TADS. George supported Iris in her role of Family History researcher for TADS and he continued to attend TADS meetings until last year.

George was born and brought up in the village of Pamber End. He was the youngest of eleven children, and received a country upbringing of farm workers, gardeners and woodsmen. The Second World War saw him serving in the Army, including the D-Day landings, which remained vivid in his memory, but which he preferred not to talk about, due to the inherent sadness that he still felt. He met Iris, a local Tadley girl in 1951, and they married in 1953, remaining in Tadley for the rest of their married life. George was a carpenter by trade and worked for local firms, including Kimbers, and Mongers the builders, who he was proud to help with their undertaking duties, which they carried out in addition to building work in those days. In later years he worked on the maintenance staff for the AWRE houses in and around Tadley and Baughurst, making many friends along the way. In the years closer to his retirement he worked "behind the wire" at the AWRE site itself. He enjoyed a happy retirement, enjoying holidays at Hayling Island, making homemade wine and over-wintered tortoises for those who needed such a service.

He leaves his wife Iris, a daughter, and five grandchildren.

The funeral Service at Tadley Common Methodist Church took place as planned on Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> February, but the burial at Tadley New Cemetery had to be delayed 2 days, when because of the snow the mechanical (grave) digger could not negotiate the hill to St Peter's.

This was not quite as long as for John Mulford's burial, which had to be delayed some 3-4 weeks in February 1814 because of the frozen ground.

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**Vacancy** - with the resignation of David Day for business reasons, TADS requires a new visit/outings organiser. Offers to Chairman Bob please.

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

### **Hampshire Record Office**

There is a Family History for Beginners event every Wednesday. The Record Office holds lunchtime lectures most 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.*

**Milestones Museum** The current special exhibition is about the **Titanic** liner ending on 22nd February.

**Willis Museum** - *The Museum is now scheduled to reopen in late April.*

### **Friends of the Willis Museum** (7.30pm at Milestones Museum)

19th Feb 'Conservation of old vehicles at Milestones' - Graham Smith

19th March 'The wild side of life on the Basingtoke Canal' - Paul Hope.

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

12th March 'Update on Sites on the Hants-Surrey Border' by David Graham  
of Surrey Archaeological Soc

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**Photographing Tadley** - *Knowing that I take the odd photograph or two, I was recently asked by another Committee member if I could provide a small number of photos that convey the character of Tadley. I failed. What is the answer? Is it the top of Mulfords Hill, which is now much like the centre of any other small town, or what? If you have any ideas please let me know and I will get out with the camera. - Richard the editor.*

*TADS annual membership is £10 per person.  
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