



July 2009

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

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

**Parish Life in Late
Medieval Reading
By Joan Dils**

(Everybody welcome - visitors £2.00)

TADS Committee

As previously reported several prominent members of the Committee will be standing down by the next AGM. Above all we need a new Treasurer. We will also need new members for the committee. Without a committee TADS will fold. Could the December AGM be the last meeting? If you can help, please make yourself known to Bob, as the future of TADS depends on members being willing to run the Society.

*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 16th September 2009:

The life of an MP.

Sir George Young, MP for NW Hants.

June meeting report (17/6/09)

TADS visit to the Museum of English Rural Life (MERL),

Reading with a talk by Dr Roy Brigden, Keeper (*Curator*)

The acronym MERL sounds perfectly rustic and rural. And it is. It's a jewelled nugget, Grade 2 listed, brick, wood, and leaded lights mansion with a tasteful modern extension sited in the middle of urban Reading. Founded in the 1950s, its £10.5 million new home has been completed since 2005 and is in the grounds of former St Andrew's Hall, Reading University. Reading is considered by many to have the UK's premier agricultural university.

Its cool, calm Keeper made you feel less panic-stricken about the state of our countryside and its conservation and preservation. How stunningly and imaginatively the artefacts were presented! Dr Brigden pointed out a wonderful work of art - a wooden 'tree', its 'branches' dripping with old butter pats, trug baskets, hay rakes and other wooden tools.

What is straw? Straw was dealt with similarly. Its uses range from corn dollies to straw ricks. There was try-on rustic clothing for kids, and cheeky stuffed rats strategically placed to add to the authentic atmosphere. The uses for straw were, and are, endless and fascinating. Surprisingly, Dr Brigden said that youngsters visiting MERL might not identify with old horse-drawn PLOUGHS, but would identify with WOOD, remembering that these by-gone implements were made in a pre-synthetic era.

In our frenetic 21st century drive to recycle and be green we tend to forget that country and town folk of yore made do and mended, padded and patched, worked with nature and tried to live the good life, perhaps as portrayed in the 1975-78 TV programmes, *'The Good Life'*

Mind you, many of the 40 or so of us attending MERL could remember the poverty and exhaustion of the supposedly good old days when people struggled to survive amid pretty challenging circumstances.

When we look nostalgically at Dr Brigden's artistic aerial display of strong, small ploughs, flying from the ceiling like tiny fat aircraft, 'speeding the plough' takes on a whole new meaning. Horses were the driving force in the countryside before tractors and other vehicles. Some of the farm machinery was hideously heavy, the weight borne by teams of exhausted cart horses and men working from sunrise to sunset, summer and winter. Not too many FAT people in the olden days! Most animals in those days were kept to work in some way and not as pets.

Behind the artistry of Britain's Specialist Museum is the fact that this may be the World's premier custodian of agricultural archives relating to food, farming and the countryside. There are a million photographic prints; 20,000 original engineering drawings of farm machinery; Ransomes' (of Ipswich) complete farm machinery archive, etc. National and international companies of TV, film makers, librarians, postcard manufacturers, researchers, etc needing to know how-it-was in the olden days, can access MERL's collections. You and I can do it for free!

Dr Brigden and his team have their eyes and ears on the future state of England BECAUSE of our past. Thanks, Dr Brigden, for an amazing visit to your exhilarating museum.

Rosemary Bond

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

Hampshire Record Office

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

Milestones Museum - The current special exhibition marks the centenary of the Red Cross in Hampshire. The special display comes from the collections of the Balfour Museum in Winchester.

Willis Museum - *The Museum has a series of Chinese themed events taking place in August and the following months.*

Friends of the Willis Museum (7.30pm at the museum)

July 16 . 'Eliza Chute, a Gentlewoman in local society in Jane Austen's day and after'. Mrs G Dunstan (*Eliza Chute and Jane Austen were personally acquainted*).

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

Hampshire & the Islands Historic Churches Trust Sponsored Ride and Stride, Saturday, 12 September 2009

The aim of 'Ride and Stride' is to enjoy visiting churches and chapels, either walking or cycling. Half the money raised goes to the Trust, to assist their work in helping restore and maintain historic churches. The other half is devoted to the church chosen by the individual walker or cyclist. Lists of churches, which may be visited, are available now, together with sponsor forms. Contact Ralph Atton, 0118 970 0825, email: ralph.atton@btopenworld.com

Lectures at Silchester Church - As part of the Reading University Festival of Archaeology there is a series of free lectures during July and August in Silchester Church. Details from Ralph Atton (*see above*) or Richard, (*see bottom of Page 1*)

Silchester Roman Town Excavations - BAHS have arranged their annual visit to the excavations on Thursday, 30 July, commencing at 6.30pm at the dig site. TADS members are welcome to join them. The public open days are Saturdays 18th July and 1st August.

Bramshill House (the National Police College) near Hartley Wintney will be open to the public from 10 - 4 on 13th Sept as part of the Heritage Open days.

Volunteer 'Diggers' are needed for the Kingsclere/Tidgrove Warren dig in September. Phone Janet Bond on 01635 297610 for more information.

NB. The price of TADS Aldermaston Airfield maps is going up. Buy yours now at the old price while stocks last

*TADS annual membership is £10 per person.
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