



September 2009

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

**Next meeting - Wednesday 16th September  
at St. Paul's Church Hall, 8.00 to 9.30 pm**

## **The life of an MP**

**By Sir George Young,**

**Member of Parliament for NW Hants.**

*(Everybody welcome - visitors £2.00)*

### **Heritage Open Days**

Basingstoke Heritage Society have a special event at the South View (Holy Ghost) Cemetery, Burgess Road, Basingstoke on Sunday 13th September. The event will include an exhibition and talks on the architecture and history of the chapels and graveyard, and an historic trail round the graveyard revealing some of the 10,000 people buried there.

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

**TADS Meeting 21st October 2009:**  
**A History of Policing**  
Ken Wells,  
Curator of the Thames Valley Police Museum

**July meeting report (15/7/09)**

**Parish Life in late Medieval Reading.**

**By Joan Dils, a multi-faceted historian**

Pictures in your mind. That's how Joan 'sees' life in late Medieval Reading (1490ish till 1540ish), when community spirit and good will abounded, apart from occasional skullduggery and bile ... And people then - as now - were keen to make a fast buck. Churches too. There were NO church collection plates in those days.

Joan's talk focused on holidays and holiness, festivals and fun. She gleaned her very considerable knowledge about the Forbury's Parish of St Laurence and its Church from the accounts of the churchwardens of the time. Life here revolved around the CHURCH calendar. Many people didn't recognise actual monthly dates! They focused on festivals - lots of them.

Lady Day was in March when churchwardens were chosen. But before that Christmas had been celebrated with a 'holy bush' costing 2d (1p). Holly, ivy, and lighted beeswax tapers decorated the church and also gave much needed winter light. Cheaper cost-cutting, foul-smelling light was obtained from animal fat tallow tapers with incense used to re-sweeten the air.

In 1524 a rood (Anglo-Saxon = cross) screen was constructed and decorated with angels and 20 lights. This was expressly to raise money for All Saints, Christmas and Easter, which is what churches did then and do now. NB. Silchester and some Devon churches have rood screens.

St Laurence's clergy had vestments of silk, satin and brocades in white and gold, possibly given by the Abbot of Reading, Hugh Faringdon, who was later killed by Henry VIII when the king sacked churches and monasteries.

The long 12 day holiday was at Christmas because it was dark and you couldn't work on the land. It ended with Epiphany (6th January) and it was back to work on Plough Monday (7th January). Presents were given on New Year's Day, especially to toady to the rich, and particularly to the king...

The Festival of Lights was Candlemas Day. Surprisingly, people often didn't work a WHOLE week because there was no work. Lent was in February/March, when it was dull, dark and miserable. The folk fasted BUT - what happened to the meat, milk, eggs and other goodies we wondered? Maybe cheese was made and isinglass, the animal egg preservative made from gelatine was known in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. You just knew that Joan would say that fish prices, went up in Lent! Quite incredibly, Sundays were not considered to be part of Lent. Oh, and Mothering Sunday didn't exist until the 17<sup>th</sup> Century.

During Holy Week the bread-and-lights-laden rood screen was back in money making mode. Three priests from St Laurence's sang in Latin for their suppers, being paid with a quart (1 litre plus) of 'good Spanish wine'. An ale-aided watch was kept from Good Friday until Easter Sunday's Pascal Candle lighting, to keep dogs out of church with paid dog minders' help! Ale is beer without hops. Hops preserve beer. Water was considered too dangerous to drink... Jolly times were had by women then men on Hock Monday and Hock Tuesday when there was chasing, kissing, supping on bread, meat, fat capons, and spices and an exchange of more money.

May Day (always the 1<sup>st</sup> of May) allowed young men to rule the roost and strut their stuff. The four bellringers from St Laurence's traditionally drank 2 gallons of beer then. Apprentices were allowed some freedom from bosses/parents, (normally you were 'under the thumb' till the age of 24).

May Day, 1500-1510, encompassed the May Fair and perhaps a hero-type play about the goodie Robin Hood; folk wore their Sunday best clothes to enjoy morris dancing, taborists, pipers, pedlars and other entertainments. Of course, money changed hands!

Rogation Days (there were 3), when parish boundaries were beaten to establish limits, came just before Ascension Day, when Jesus rose up to heaven. Ten days later came Whitsuntide, with more parish ale, pastries, cakes, meat, and a parish knees-up, Jean said. Plus more money making for the church roof, or bells, or benches, etc.

After the Corpus Christi holiday the impending haymaking and harvest meant serious work to be done, the hours being set by the sun's light. Townspeople often joined in to earn the odd crust.

St Michael's Day (Michaelmas) saw work contracts concluded, or started for the following year. Although people prayed for a good harvest, they didn't say thank you. So NO Harvest Festival until the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Hallowe'en came in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and 1<sup>st</sup> November was All Saints' Day. All Souls' Day (2<sup>nd</sup> November) saw people praying for the souls of the dead. Poor people clubbed together in self-help groups and went to the funerals of the rich. They were 'paid' in BREAD, the best bread being wheat, then barley, then MASLIN (or mixture) bread, which kept well. Bad times saw ground pea and bean bread.

And so the Church 'wheel' of holiness and holidays, fun and festivals completed its full circle, only to be buckled a bit by the religious and political turbulence of the 16th Century Reformation which bashed the community spirit a tad.

Thank you Jean, for your amazing revelations so rivetingly revealed to about 60 TADS members.

Rosemary Bond

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

**Willis Museum** - *The Museum has a series of Chinese themed events taking place in September and October.*

**Friends of the Willis Museum** (7.30pm at the Wessex Hall of the URC, London Rd.)

Sept. 17 'The Queen's Bodyguard of the Yeomen of the Guard.' By John Hook.

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

Sept. 10 - 'Popley, Basingstoke: the evolution of a prehistoric and Romano British landscape' by Alastair Barclay

**Hampshire & the Islands Historic Churches Trust Sponsored Ride and Stride, Saturday, 12 September 2009** - See July Newsletter for details.

**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.

**Hampshire Field Club** - The Hampshire Field Club and Archaeological Society was founded in 1885 to foster and promote the county's heritage and history. Although the society has changed a great deal over the decades, it continues to study and promote Hampshire through its four sections: Archaeology, Historic Buildings, Landscape and Local History.

The Society organises conferences, seminars, talks and lectures throughout the year as well as trips and visits to embrace all these four aspects of the county and its surrounding area. Two Newsletters per year are published for members, plus an annual journal, Hampshire Studies, and the occasional Monograph.

For further information about the Society and all its activities why not visit the website [www.fieldclub.hants.org.uk](http://www.fieldclub.hants.org.uk) and see why, if you have any historical or archaeological interest, you should join.

*TADS annual membership is £10 per person.  
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