

December 2011



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

**Next meeting - Wednesday 14th December 2011
at St. Paul's Church Hall, 8.00 to 9.30pm**

TADS AGM & Social

Minutes of the last AGM

Annual reports

Treasurer's report and annual accounts

2011 Programme

Election of Committee

Any other business

There will be a locally themed quiz with a small prize, which can be completed after the formal AGM.

Members are invited to bring along items of family history which may be of interest to other members.

The Committee would welcome donations of food and help with the domestic work.

*Comments, queries and suggestions to Richard Brown (0118) 9700100,
e-mail: richard@iilexind.plus.com or Carol Stevens (0118) 9701578*

www.tadshistory.com

TADS Meeting 18th January 2012

'The work of a Registrar'

by Steve Thirkettle

Last Meeting 16th November:

The Story Of Thornycroft

by Christopher Tree (plus 3 mates)

Who'd have thought that Morrison's Supermarket, off the Worting Road, Basingstoke, stands today where once was a maze of machine shops and other massive buildings, making all things large and small and technical for commercial vehicles. That's grinding, milling and turning, creating 'swarf' (re-usable metal shavings), pulleys and blocks, crankcases, exploders for 4,000 bombs, transverse depth charges, torpedo rudders, silencers, engine mountings, solid rubber tyres, then pneumatic ones, tank carriers and more ... and also, the 1902 Warrior Queen Boadicea statue on the north side of Westminster bridge was created by Thomas Thornycroft, founder of the Company and father of John I Thornycroft.

About 70 TADS' members and Thornycroft devotees were very impressed by Chris's devotion to his alma mater: Thornycroft of Basingstoke. They were manufacturers of a myriad of commercial and Army vehicles, plus the odd bus, e.g. a 1931 20-seater for Kent's Coaches of Baughurst.

Chris, and his mates, all ex-apprentices and now retired engineers, etc; Gary, Mervyn (Coaches, of Micheldever) and Tom of Cliddesden, are equally enthusiastic with their life-enhancing, all-consuming hobby.

Thornys moved to expand by following the Southern Railway line to Basingstoke in 1898, after an 1864 start in Chiswick. They were Basingstoke's biggest employer for 60 years on the 60-acre site. The 2,500 workforce trod on 'comfortable wooden block floors' Chris said. They had pioneered commercial steam vehicles in 1895.

Thornys took advantage of the Southern Railway branch line to Alton and had railway sidings running from it right into the machine shops.

Stalwart Chris showed us aerial photos of Thorny's site and they were very well organised, even if the 21st century 'elf-and-safety' people would have had a coronary, for, among other things, the factory's electricity generators were underneath a 470 ton water reservoir - the water came from a 40-foot (13 m) well under it all.....

During WWI. Thornys contributed to the war effort, but really expanded the business in WWII, 1939-45, when sand-bagged and vulnerable to German bombs and rockets, they manufactured a massive range of vehicles and equipment. There was a power house with generators to produce the Works' power: 600 hp, 250 rpm with an output of 770 kilowatts - enough power for a ship! The factory used 50 tons of coke, 10 of coal and 10 of anthracite each WEEK.

They made 13,000 vehicles of 29 types, 15,000 engines totalling over 1 million hp altogether and 8,230 Bren Gun Carriers (one photograph shows King George VI sitting proudly inside). These would have stretched 19.83 miles, Chris said, if put bumper to bumper (odd statistic!), plus 1,850 sets of flotation gear and 1,600 searchlight carriers. Incidentally, one third of the workforce was women during WWII.

Obviously there was wartime secrecy always in force, and war vehicles carried touching notes in their cabs - 'Please give this vehicle love and care!' etc. The Thorny freight train wagons were covered with black tarpaulins for secrecy and safety.

Alf Russell was a Charge Hand making and testing depth charges - a risky job. One of the RAF's 'Amazon' bomber-parts 6-wheeled transporters is now restored and in Basingstoke's Milestones Museum. 3,000 4x4 'Nubian' vehicles were desert-camouflaged with the chassis raised away from the terrain.

After the war, Thornys continued to make and improve their vehicles. They changed from solid rubber tyres to pneumatic tyres in 1926, and in 1946-7 from petrol to diesel engines.

British Road Services bought their 8-wheeler 6-cylinder diesel lorries. Ahead of their time, Thornys put brakes on each axle but although speeds of 40mph were possible and safe, 20mph was the official limit. 30mph was breathtakingly quick in 1947...

Thornycrofts supplied special lorries to the Middlesbrough iron and steel producers, Dorman and Long, who built the Newcastle Tyne Bridge (1928) and Australia's Sydney Harbour Bridge (1932).

When the need for repairs arose, Thornys had Basingstoke-trained mechanics at Newcastle, Manchester and Leeds depots. The Leeds engineering shop overlooked Headingly Cricket Ground. From the roof, some personnel would precariously balance and watch the cricket!

Thornys diversified widely with vehicles like their 'Sturdies', and the 'Nubian' fire crash tenders for airports worldwide. In 1949, the I.P.C. (Iraqi Petroleum Company) bought to the East Mediterranean. Each tractor unit weighed 16 tons pulling 100 ton gross weight, powered by a Rover Meteorite V8 diesel engine. This vehicle was the mighty 'Antar' - Arab Warrior. Antars proved so reliable, the British Army placed orders, but with PETROL engines.

The 1951 Festival of Britain was a showcase for Britain, including vehicles. The Dutch and South Americans bought Antars, even though the petrol consumption of their 250 hp engines was only 2 miles per gallon - the tank held 900 gallons.... petrol seemed to flow like water then.

Australia's Snowy Mountain River Hydro Electric Power Project used Antars. Mervyn has been tenderly persuaded to sell his beloved Antar to the Project Museum. Tears flowed when his pride and joy went to Australia - but I hear he has another Antar.

1961 saw Thornycroft sell out to the AEC Group and eventually the Basingstoke site went to the Safeway Supermarket group (before Morrison's).

All is not lost! The pride that Chris and the other founder members of the 1991 Thornycroft Society have, generates the Basingstoke War Memorial Park Transport Festival, which had 900 entries in 2010. There are other events, too. I contacted Chris one evening. Where was he? Under his Thornycroft vehicle! Such devotion and worthwhile preservation of historical vehicles is marvellous.

Thank you Chris, and your mates, for the very historical, technical and enjoyable show.

NB If you want an Antar, they're about £18,000. The next Thornycroft Festival is 13th May 2012. Membership enquiries to Mervyn on 01962 774574.

Rosemary Bond

Family History Books, CDs and Cassini Maps on sale at the AGM

Jane and I have recently become the Bookstall ‘managers’ for the Reading Branch of the Berkshire Family History Society. With the agreement of the Committee we are going to bring our stock to the AGM. While many of the items relate to Berkshire County (pre 1974), there is much of general interest, including how to get started in Family History guides and books of the ‘My Ancestor was’ series. This is an opportunity to buy items you will not see in regular book shop.

Richard Brown

Annual Subscriptions are now due. It will be put to the AGM that these will remain at **£12 per person**.

If you are paying at a meeting will you please put your cheque or cash in an envelope bearing your address (a second hand envelope will do). This will help the Treasurer recognise who has paid and get the receipts prepared. New members please give your details, including Phone Number and email address. Subs may also be sent to our PO Box. (See bottom of Page 6.)

History in the making

Sylvia Rogers 1935 -2011. Sadly Sylvia lost her battle with breast cancer last month. Sylvia & Bert had lived in Tadley since 1962 and were long time TADS members, although they had not been to recent meetings.

Over one hundred people attended her funeral, and no wonder - she was warm, caring, kind, generous, hospitable interested in everyone and everything from caravanning to folk music, jazz, jiving and skiffle (she played the washboard!), WI, theatre and much, much more.....

Our condolences to Bert, Clive, Kay and family. Adieu, dear friend.

Rosemary Bond

Arthur Attwood - ‘Mr Basingstoke’ The Basingstoke Heritage society have put up a blue plaque in his memory in Church Street at the entrance to Joice’s Yard. The ceremony and work of Arthur were featured on BBC TV’s South Today programme on 8th December.

What's on? Events which may be of interest

Hampshire Record Office *For information ring 01962846154 or see www3.hants.gov.uk/whatson-hro*

Milestones Museum. For coming events: Tel. 01256 477766 or see: www3.hants.gov.uk/milestones/whatson

Tuesday 20th to Friday 23rd December - 1940s Christmas at Milestones. Traditional war time party games and 'make do and mend' activities.

Willis Museum

The museum is running an ever changing series of special exhibitions in the Sainsbury Gallery, these currently include: the Shaw Trust Zoomers photography group Exhibition; and the Veolia Environnement Wildlife Photographer of the Year.

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

Dec 16th Members' Christmas Party. *(I have no information on their January Meeting- Ed).*

Basingstoke Archaeological & History Society

12th Jan. - Sources for landscape and garden history at Hampshire Records Office by Jane Harris, Senior Archivist, HRO

**The Committee wish members
and friends a Happy Christmas
and a prosperous New Year.**

*TADS annual membership is £12 per person.
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