



May 2012

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

Next meeting - Wednesday 16th May 2012
at St. Paul's Church Hall, 8.00 to 9.30pm

***'The banknote makers -
the history of Portals'***

by Dave Stone

(Everybody welcome - visitors £2.50)

The Tadley Tracks, Tadley Facts Book has been very well received since it went on sale and much praised. Total sales are approaching 300. There will not be any publications on sale at the May meeting due to several Committee members being away. If you want to buy a copy, or additional copies, it is on sale at the Library and at Profile Print and Copy in the Bishopswood Road shops.

*Comments, queries and suggestions to Richard Brown (0118) 9700100,
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www.tadshistory.com

TADS Meeting 20th June 2012

‘Biscuits, bats and balls - the story of Huntley and Palmers’

by Martin Bishop

Last meeting - 18th April

Berkshire Lady Fliers

By Geoff & Val Beckett

In the 21st century, if a woman pilots a commercial aircraft, it's generally nationally newsworthy.

In the late 19th century and throughout much of the 20th century, there seems to have been a frenzy of lady fliers, very skilled, some very eccentric and many of them feminine and pretty. Some were formidable though.....

Medicals for fliers were not a big thing and tuition could last all of half a day! As for bravery, they flew with map, compass, followed roads, railways and intuition.

Tadley knows all about the 19th century balloonist who happened over our then-village and enquired of a country chap: "Where am I?" "Tadley, God help us!" quivered the terrifyingly startled yokel, thinking it was God....

Since Mongolfier's 1783 hot air balloon, then the hydrogen one of 1783, the coal gas balloon of 1821, the hot air petrol one of 1902 and the 1970 propane one, men and women have flown aircraft for sport, science, celebration (Coronation of William IV 1831 and Queen Victoria 1837), for adventure and showmanship etc.

A Mrs Graham flew from Windsor and landed 12 miles away in what is now the middle of London's Heathrow Airport! She did 31 balloon flights. Berkshire seems to have had a plethora of adventuresome men and LADIES regarding airborne activities. In 1903, Gertrude Bacon took her husband on a 'jolly' towards the Bristol Channel, saw the sea, ditched the balloon near a barbed wire fence and Mr. B ended up in photos, with badly ripped trousers and his right leg exposed!

Of course, fliers were killed in the quest for new flying, as was Violet Kavanagh in 1908. Winifred Spooner had a commercial aeroplane pilot's licence in 1927 even when some men were patronising to her and to other lady fliers.

One of the most interesting and showy of women fliers and aircraft designers (1930) was the theatrically opportunist 'Blossom' Maxine (nee Freeman) Viscountess Ratendone. She soon tired of her more elderly Viscount when she clapped eyes on, and fell in love with, Fred 'F.G.' Miles. Soon they were partners and the flamboyant pair designed and flew aircraft from Shoreham, West Sussex and Woodley Aerodromes, etc.etc. This is notwithstanding 'Blossom's' glass eye! If 'Blossom's' husband discovered the pairs shenanigans he kept shtum because divorce and affairs at this time in the 1930s were scandalous. Geoff alleged that 'Blossom's' aunt (also theatrical) was the mistress of Winston Churchill.... Anyway, 'Blossom' was involved with the *Satyr*, a de Havilland Moth, (1932) and many other aircraft.

Amy Johnson, the legendary and world-famous lady flier, raced aircraft around Woodley and Twyford against 9 other women in 1931... Joan Hughes and Lettice Curtis were local 'gals' who were brilliant fliers. Joan flew at the age of 15 and was an instructor at 19! Lettice Curtis, until recently a very formidable lady, had an Oxford Maths degree and Blues in swimming, lacrosse and tennis. With many other lady fliers she flew during WWII with the ATA (Air Transport Auxilliary).

Spitfires were assembled at Henley-on-Thames and the women - and men - piloted them to where required. Aldermaston Airfield was popular because it had a hard runway, as opposed to grass.

In 1942 Joan Hughes delivered, ALL IN ONE DAY: an Anson, a Spitfire, a Mosquito, a Tiger Moth, a Mustang and a Wellington bomber to airfields all over Britain!

During WWII, the ATA had 1,300 pilots working for them, of whom 166 were female. It was dangerous work but 308,000 planes were delivered including Spitfires and Hurricanes. Lettice Curtis flew 4-engined bombers, etc. In 1965 Joan Hughes, a tiny lady, flew a flimsy, specially-built replica plane for the film 'Those Magnificent Men in their Flying Machines'. Men being too big and heavy.

All the Berkshire lady fliers were magnificent and brave and they had to fly in appalling weather with no navigation aids.

Geoff and Val are also quite remarkable - he of the written word and aircraft paintings and she of the beautiful speaking voice for Geoff's quotations.

Thank you both, from an enthralled TADS group.

Rosemary Bond

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

11:00am Saturday and Sunday 19/20 May - The Southern AEC vehicles Centenary Gathering.

Saturday 2nd June - a 1950s event to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee.

Willis Museum

Saturday 2nd June - Community Museum Open Day at The Willis Museum celebrating the Diamond Jubilee and the Olympics from 10am.

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

17th May - 'Spring Wood, Hackwood' by Brian Spicer

Basingstoke Archaeological & History Society *(7.30 at Church Cottage)*

14th June - AGM – Followed by: 'Basingstoke Archaeology and the Public' by Tim Shadla-Hall – Institute of Archaeology, UCL

Silchester Roman Town - The Reading University 16th Insula IX dig will be from 2nd July to 12th August.

It is with regret that we have learned of the death of **Dr Marshall Barr** who spoke to TADS last June on the history of Reading's two hospitals.

Please note the **change of correspondence address** in the panel below, as we have cancelled our Post Office Box due to ever increasing cost and the collection point being moved to Basingstoke.

***TADS annual membership is £12 per person.
Correspondence to Tadley and District History Society,
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