



**May 2013**

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

**Next meeting - Wednesday 15th May 2013  
at St. Paul's Church Hall, 8.00 to 9.30pm**

**‘A Cockney Childhood ’  
by Maggie Filkins**

*(Everybody welcome - visitors £2.50)*

**Committee News** - Commemoration of the centenary of the start of World War I next year. An informal meeting was held last month to consider ideas. As a result it is proposed that an exhibition would be held with an emphasis on the effect on Tadley and area. Stories are needed about any aspect, including relatives who served, and the impact on those left behind. Information to Carol (and volunteers) (See below for Tel No.)

*Comments, queries and suggestions to Richard Brown (0118) 9700100,  
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**[www.tadshistory.com](http://www.tadshistory.com)**

**TADS Meeting 19th June 2013:  
'The Willis Archives'  
by John Holland**

**TADS Meeting 17th April**

**The Victorian Defences of Britain  
By Michael Forrest,**

Cruise ship lecturer & Portsmouth Artillery Volunteer

Michael says that his museum, Fort Nelson, nr. Fareham, Hampshire, is the 'loudest museum in the world' *i.e.* grown-up boys dressed up as 2<sup>nd</sup> Hampshire Volunteer Artillery re-enacting Victorian gun warfare of the 1880s with the real McCoy: black gunpowder made from saltpetre, charcoal and sulphur and dished out sparingly to these 'boys' in a sealed box and kept in a sealed compound!

The 150 year old gun has a 2 mile range, is a 64 R.M.L. (Rifle Muzzle Loader) and does 5 firings on a show day. It uses 6lbs (3kg) of black gun powder and is manned by 6 men, any one of whom may be gun captain for the day. Quite surprisingly, the gun crew wear white because the material can be boiled, but it isn't big on camouflage.

Michael's lecture uncurled in a positive way, from Queen Victoria ascending the throne in 1837 but with NO WAR to fight, except the foreign 1853-6 Crimean War. The rest were skirmishes - and so it was deemed necessary to reduce the size of the 2 armed forces. We built strong defences around our coasts because of the shenanigans of Napoleon I's nephew, Napoleon III (reigned 1852-1870 and amazingly, ended up in exile and died in Farnborough, Hants). We did have the iron-clad warship, HMS Warrior, which is STILL in Portsmouth Dockyard. Napoleon I had wielded sabres, but his nephew merely rattled them, while envying the Brits' way of life and making us so nervous that one Henry John Temple, 3<sup>rd</sup> Lord Palmerston, Prime Minister from 1855-58 and 1859-65, wound everyone up by creating the Royal Commission on Defence in Britain. This meant that a lot of men spent a year tootling around our coasts and inlets doing a survey as to our vulnerability to French aspirations!

This created jobs for the boys because 100 new forts and gun batteries were built - with 100 more in the pipeline. As Hampshire is not too far north of France across

the English Channel, and Pompey (Portsmouth) has been our premier Royal Naval base for centuries, 52 forts were built around Portsea Island. Four of these like draughts on a gaming board are actually in the sea at Spithead built on top of subterranean chalk with their own fresh water springs. They remain there in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Portsmouth Hill is seven miles long, with stunning views of Portsea Island and the Isle of Wight. Five forts were cunningly constructed in the chalk of the Hill and 4 of these remain: Purbrook, Widley, Southwick and the famous Fort Nelson. We were paranoid about being attacked from the land, too! Fort Nelson is constructed with about 10 million Fareham Red bricks - also used for the Royal Albert Hall in London and once exported all over the world; even as far as Australia and New Zealand....

Nelson is 350 yards (approx 300m) wide and can't be seen from the sea 2 miles away because it's dug into the Portsmouth Hill chalk. Also, it was not easily fired on. It had lots of gun ports, a caponier ('chicken house') where the gun crews were safely housed. A 'redan' was the nerve centre of the fort.

The forts were all dug by hand with walls and ditches lined with Fareham Reds, flint, grass and chalk to absorb any alien gunfire. They were utilitarian, except for Victoria's royal cypher.

Fort Nelson's barracks were considered very unhygienic with a death rate higher than in a prison. The ventilation, etc. was bad and so in 1880 it was made light and airy and had an infirmary, cookhouse, obviously a well, and herbs growing to provide flavour and pleasant odours. 'Universal basins' were rather odd and used for food, washing and showering, etc. etc. Scots pine and English oak were the preferred woods for furniture: definitely no French oak.

As the 2 armed forces of the day were reduced in number, (which smacks of 21<sup>st</sup> century cuts in our 3 armed forces), volunteer units were raised in 1860. The volunteers were eager, very well trained at evenings and weekends and could be used in any emergency. They were the forerunners of the Territorial Army.

Incentives were prizes, plus (1884) beer money of 3 guineas for a gun crew.

History and life are never static. The Portsmouth forts never saw any anger or action, even in WWII and so many of them are derelict. By 1979 Fort Nelson was in a sad state of disrepair and had been vandalised. In 1983 the Ministry of Defence sold it to the Forts Society.

Michael's talk was wonderfully energising and exciting. Anyone can be a P.A.V. (Portsmouth Artillery Volunteer). It's certainly a less usual hobby!  
Thanks, Michael.

Rosemary Bond

*It's free to visit. See [www.palmerstonfortsociety.org.uk](http://www.palmerstonfortsociety.org.uk)*

## **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

**Willis Museum** ( Tel: 08456035635) - The museum is running an ever changing series of special exhibitions in the Sainsbury Gallery. Forthcoming exhibits include contemporary and local artists. There are also activities aimed at young people.

Special event -Alençon Lace, 10am Sat. 18 May to Sat. 29 Jun.

Since the 16th century, Basingstoke's French twin town Alençon has been home to fine lace-making. Made with needles, the Point d Alençon requires a high level of skills and craftsmanship as making just one square centimetre of lace takes up to seven hours. This exhibition at the Willis Museum provides the opportunity to discover the technique behind the Point d Alençon and to admire unique original pieces. On Friday 28 and Saturday 29 June, two of the seven lace-makers who are the only ones in the world who possess the production technique for the Point d Alençon will be at the Museum to show how Alençon lace is made.

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

May 16th: 'The coming of the railway to Basingstoke', by David Brace.

June 20th: The Portsmouth to London Road, by Jennifer Goldsmith.

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

June 13th - AGM followed by Member's contributions

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**Street Lighting** - We have been told that next May and June there will be a major programme of work to bring the district's street lighting up to modern standards of efficiency. This will involve erecting a large number of new columns and replacing existing lanterns.

***TADS annual membership is £12 per person.  
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