



**October 2015**

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

**Next meeting - Wednesday 21st October 2015  
at St. Paul's Church Hall, 8.00 to 9.30pm**

**‘Major Ralph Henry Sneyd  
of Heckfield’**

*By Keith Haines*

*(Everybody welcome - visitors £2.50)*

**Exhibition.** The Project Group have produced information sheets on the 6 men named on the Tadley War Memorial who were killed in World War II. These complement those for the 31 men killed in World War I. All the sheets and other displays, including a new one on Life in Tadley during WWII, will be exhibited in St. Paul's Church and Hall on Saturday November 7th from 14.00 - 17.00 and Sunday 8th from 10.00 - 17.00. Afterwards they will be displayed in Tadley Library.

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

**[www.tadshistory.com](http://www.tadshistory.com)**

## **TADS Meeting 18th November 2015**

### **‘The last days of King Charles I’**

By Alan Turton

## **TADS Meeting 16th September 2015**

### **The Abbey and the Castle – Reading in the Middle Ages.**

By Mike Cooper,

Mike was an erudite historical sort of chap who also had a quirky interest in The Medieval 'bowels' of Reading. What was discharged into various water courses was 'nobody's business' (or everyone's!) - no wonder Readingensians and most Medieval people drank ALE. The smell of Reading was pretty putrid. This was contributed to by the notoriously noxious hide tanning industry. The tanners needed water, and lots of it, at their tanning vats on the site of where Reading's Oracle Shopping Centre is now. So the water flowed in and out and all around, polluting and tainting much of smelly Reading.

Medieval records even mention by name, flatulent residents.....a bit below the belt!

The smallish town of Reading existed then on a bank of gravel, surrounded by the Rivers Thames, Kennet and the non-fragrant Holy Brook. This and various streams supplied the Abbey but a whole waterlogged area of soggy water meadows and marshland encompassed even that..... Reading was liable to flooding then and Mike said it is NOW. As an employee of Reading Borough Council he issues sandbags as and when necessary.

It must be said that Medieval settlements were always smelly.

Notwithstanding all of the above, the gravel supported Reading Abbey on an area where The Oracle outlet is now. Obviously archaeological digs took place there before the building began about 20 years ago. Reading's was a big abbey, the biggest and foremost after Westminster Abbey. There was also a big abbey at Wallingford.

Reading did have a castle – none of it remains, Mike said, because it was probably made of wood.

It was destroyed in 1153 and may have been sited in the Forbury Gardens area.

There are moves for more research, exploration and then conservation, perhaps with Lottery Funding for the Abbey and the *let's find it at all costs* castle.

These ruins could pull in tourists and do for Reading what Richard III's remains did for Leicester and part of Alfred the Great, may do for Winchester.

871 AD saw 'Redding's' first mention; and in 1086 there were 116 families there: 500+ people dealing with hides, pigs, 7 water mills and 5 fisheries. In 1121 The Abbey was started by Henry I and by 1520 Reading was the richest provincial town in the land, because of the wood trade.

Between 1100-1200: Sts. Giles and Laurence Churches were constructed. 1200-1300: Castle Street and Caversham Bridge appeared. The 100 metre (approx. 100 yds) St. Mary's Butts area was where ACCURATE long bow archery was practised. Mike said 100 yds. is 'a good range for knocking down a French Knight.....!'

Hugh of Amiens was the first Abbot, 1123, and the Abbey was a very commercial outlet, worth circa £2,000/year or £21,000,000 in 21<sup>st</sup> Century money. The Oracle archaeological dig revealed a 1300 kitchen building which served hot food: the forerunner of the takeaway – for hungry pilgrims, farmers, fair-goers, the 100 or so Benedictine monks and associated helpers, plus some nuns. Mike said this takeaway created encouraging aromas for Reading's tradesmen: butchers, bakers, cheesemakers, fishmongers etc., who benefitted.

In the 1990s an 11<sup>th</sup> Century oak mill wheel was excavated in the Abbey area. It was about 6 feet (2 metres) across and preserved because it was in the Water Mill water.

Incidentally, Henry I, son of Matilda, built the Abbey NOT for altruistic reasons but for himself: as a display of piety and wealth; as a hospital and almshouse for travellers and pilgrims, and to house the poor and ultimately, his own body!

Henry died in France in 1531 and his body was returned in a 'very high state.....' This being the case, Mike said, he was probably chucked unceremoniously in the Thames – no chance, then, of reclaiming his body as with Richard III in Leicester and part of King Alfred the Great, in Winchester. Not helpful to Reading's tourism.....

The Abbot was always landlord for the WHOLE of Reading. The last Abbot was Hugh Faringdon, who got himself executed in the melee of 1539. However, there's an R.C. School named after the last Abbot.

Poor regal, holy Abbey: Henry VIII came pounding along in a temper because of personal reasons (wives!) in 1539. His men destroyed it and many other religious establishments throughout the land. (Just as ISIL is destroying relics in Syria and other Middle East countries in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century).

Tadley isn't mentioned in Reading Abbey's charter but Aldermaston is, because the Abbey owned land there, and one worthy became mayor of Reading.

Mike's sense of mischief was palpable and we had some good lavatorial laughs.

Thank you Mike, for your deep and revealing talk.

Rosemary Bond.

## ***What's on? Events which may be of interest***

**Milestones Museum.** For coming events: Tel. 01256 477766 or see: [www3.hants.gov.uk](http://www3.hants.gov.uk) & search for - milestones museum

Saturday 7th & Sunday 8th Nov. - 15th Anniversary Heritage Weekend at Milestones Museum.

**Willis Museum** - The museum is running an ever changing series of special exhibitions in the Sainsbury Gallery. The Museum also hold workshops on assorted topics. *For information tel 0845 603 5635 or see <http://hampshireculturaltrust.org.uk/venue-events/52>*

One current exhibition is 'Wildlife Photographer of the Year'. Ends 31 Oct.

**Friends of the Willis Museum** (7.30pm at the museum - booking essential for non-members. Book through the museum telephone number above)

November 19th. Darwin's Apprentice - the personal archaeology collection of Sir John Lubbock, by Dr Janet Owen, author and executive officer of Hampshire Cultural Trust,.

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

12th Nov. - A bird's eye view of Cranbourne Chase, by Martin Green

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## **Betamax Video Tape**

TADS has an old Betamax cassette. It may contain some interesting footage of Tadley around year 2000. If anyone can play this tape (or know someone who can) we would be grateful if they would please contact me.

Richard B

***TADS annual membership is £12 per person.  
Correspondence to Tadley and District History Society,  
c/o 5 Church Road Pamber Heath Tadley. RG26 3DP  
Email: [tadshistory@googlemail.com](mailto:tadshistory@googlemail.com)***