



**September 2018**

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

**Next meeting - Wednesday 19th September 2018  
at St. Paul's Church Hall, 8.00 to 9.30pm**

# **‘A Grandmother’s Legacy’**

*An insight into five generations of an Anglo-Indian  
family during the British Raj’*

**By Jenny Mallin**

*(Everybody welcome - Visitors £3.00)*

**The Project team** has been working very hard to get their new book about the **Tadley War Memorial** finished and off to the printers. Launch day is Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> November in the Ambrose Allen Centre.

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

**TADS Meeting 17<sup>th</sup> October 2018**

**‘Spies in Petticoats’**

**by Carol Brown**

**TADS Meeting 18<sup>th</sup> July 2018**

**Isambard Kingdom Brunel  
and  
The Great Western Railway.**

**by Lionel Williams.**

What a lad! Genius engineer, good with everything except building locomotives. Worked too hard. Died youngish. Invented the flat-pack, wrongly attributed to that famous Swedish firm. Clever family – his sister, Sophia, was married to the architect connected to the Santorini Hospital, 310 miles from Sevastopol, Crimea.

Isambard's Atmospheric Railway system is still in use in N. California, (Aug. 2018) having failed on the railway line West of Exeter in the 1850s. This was because the leather seals were chewed away by rats! (*A widely held urban myth. It was actually the Devon weather which destroyed the leather – Ed*).

Our hero's other attributes include designing a bridge at Balmoral Castle, Scotland; the railway line from Wapping to Rotherhithe – completing his Dad's work; Paddington Station etc. etc. He dreamed of the Paddington line ending up in New York via Bristol. Consequently he built the iron hulled ship S.S. Great Britain ahead of its time. Everyone said iron would sink! (1843). Brunel avoided the G.W.R. (Great Western Railway) going through the Marlborough Downs and instead constructed the controversial but famous 9,636 feet long (2,950m. approx.) Box Tunnel, near Bath, 1836. He was aided by 4,000 men and 300 horses. Sadly 100 of those navvies died before completion on 30<sup>th</sup> June 1841. His Bristol Meads Station, 1842, is the oldest in the world.

As railways became extensive over Britain, there was the problem of TIME, rather willy-nilly then, it had to be synchronised e.g. Reading was 4 minutes

later than London; Bath and Bristol, 11 1/2 minutes behind..... (N.B. Christ Church Cathedral's clock in Oxford is STILL kept 5 mins. late).

Isambard was Portsmouth-born in 1806 (died 1859). His Dad, Sir Marc, of French extraction, 1769-1849, was also a clever engineer. Isambard's English Mum's maiden name was Kingdom. Marc had been the engineer in charge of the Thames Tunnel Company in London. Isambard eventually completed the work.

Slough, Berks, did not have a railway station – in case it 'interfered with the Eton boys' studies and moral welfare....' so they built a PUB instead!

The River Thames at Maidenhead was 200 ft. (100 m. approx) wide, and in Brunel's mind, difficult to bridge. At first the bridge sagged but he fixed it, Lionel said. And the bridge is in daily use in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and on a very busy line the flattest brick arches in the world.

Sonning, on the Berks - Oxon border didn't have a tunnel but 1,200 navvies and 200 horses dug a 60 ft. (20 m) deep cutting which was 2 miles long, 1838-39. Casualties were taken to the Royal Berks Hospital (1839).

In 1840 Reading Station was built single-sided on somewhat of a muddled, Spaghetti-Junction type of crossed railway lines....

Our hero also built the Great Western Hotel in Swindon in 1841. Swindon's population was 2,459 then, but it swelled to 19,000 because of the G.W.R. and its Railway Works. 95% of the population (1881) worked on the railway and they got free travel.

As Isambard was so rotten at locomotive building, it was lucky that loco-engineer Daniel Gooch saved his bacon by taking over building the engines. The public learned by bitter experience not to sit on the trains' roof, or cling on somewhere and expire of the cold, because trains were travelling at 30 mph. (Previously the trains didn't have a roof).

Brunel also built the Royal Albert Bridge over the River Tamar, 1859, between Saltash, Cornwall and Plymouth, Devon. Although single track it still carries the main railway line into Cornwall. Alongside it is the Tamar road bridge.

Sadly, many of our hero's projects were completed after he died aged only 53 years. The River Severn Tunnel into S. Wales was constructed between 1873 – 1886 and is still pumped out because there's a water spring in it.....

Brunel's memory certainly enthused later engineers to carry on his good work. In 1923 all the little railway companies amalgamated, but the only one to retain its name was the G.W.R.

The line from Paddington to Penzance was finally completed on 4<sup>th</sup> May 1859. Sleeper cars were added in 1877.

Who knows what else Isambard Kingdom Brunel could have achieved had he lived longer.

Thank you, Lionel, for your extraordinary stories about Isambard.

Rosemary Bond.

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## **TADS visit to Fawley Hill Museum and Railway on 2<sup>nd</sup> September**

23 TADS members, family and friends, found their way to the estate of the late Sir William McAlpine, which is well hidden in the Chiltern Hills above Henley-on-Thames, on what turned out to be a lovely late summer day.

The museum is set at the head of a valley with the standard gauge railway winding up it to the top station. The railway has an gradient of 1 in 13 and is by far the steepest standard gauge railway in the country. It has plain rails and no racks/cogs or similar assistance. (Plain railways are not normally steeper than about 1 in 85). The sound of their steam tank engine galloping up the slope was music for the ears of the steam buffs, especially where it echoed off the other side of the valley.

The museum houses an extraordinary collection of railway ephemera; paintings, posters, enamel advertising signs, furniture, models and much more. In particular, we were much taken with the mahogany ceremonial wheelbarrow.

David Cullum took the locomotive footplate ride awarded the TADS party, and found himself in the company of a young lady fireman.

Among the rolling stock on the site are two full-size retired Royal railway carriages. There was much speculation as to how they were got to the museum via the steep, twisty and narrow local roads.

We had hoped to see in action the ex-Tadley Jimmy Williams fairground gallopers which are at the museum. Unfortunately they failed their last safety inspection and remained covered up.

Thank you Carol for organising the visit.

Richard Brown



***The Fawley Hill locomotive pounds up the hill***

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There is still time to book on **Tadley WEA's** Autumn course:

**Great Women Artists – Who are they?** Course Ref: C3742893  
Tutor: Sandra Smith Dates: 26<sup>th</sup> October 2018 to 7<sup>th</sup> December 2018  
Time: 9.45am to 11.45am Fee: £60.20

Please enrol on-line via the WEA website [www.enrolonline.wea.org.uk](http://www.enrolonline.wea.org.uk) or telephone Freephone: 0300 303 3464.

For further information on these courses or about the branch please contact:  
Jan Smith (Secretary) [jansmith@btopenworld.com](mailto:jansmith@btopenworld.com) 01189832251 or Mary  
Covers (Treasurer) [MaryCovers@aol.com](mailto:MaryCovers@aol.com) 01189832995

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

**Milestones Museum.** For coming events: Tel. 01256 477766 or see:

<http://hampshireculturaltrust.org.uk/milestones-museum>

29<sup>th</sup> & 30<sup>th</sup> September **Fashion on a Ration.** Want to know how to make your wartime ration go further? Then join us for Fashion on a Ration and discover how to make the most of your ration and still look glamorous!

**Willis Museum** - The museum is running an ever changing series of special exhibitions in the Sainsbury Gallery. The Museum also holds workshops on assorted topics. *For information tel. 01256 465902 or see <http://hampshireculturaltrust.org.uk/venue-events/52>*

22 Sept - 27 Oct, **Machinery.** This year's exhibition from Basingstoke Art Club is themed around Machinery.

**Friends of the Willis Museum** (7.30 pm at the museum - Non-members £2, booking essential through the museum telephone number 01256 465902)

20 Sept - **Donnington Castle** by Alex Godden, Archaeological Officer of West Berkshire.

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

11th October - **Trafalgar; the Nelson touch** by Paul Chamberlin  
an Independent historian.

## **TADS Website**

The website is now back online. There is still a mystifying problem with the 'Publications' link which does not work at the moment. Once the new book is off to the printers Ian and Neil hope to get it cured.

***TADS annual membership is £18 per person.  
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