



July 2024

TADS Newsletter

Website - www.tadshistory.com

**Next Meeting - Monday 8th July 2024 at 8 pm, at
Baughurst and Heath End Village Hall, Heath End Road,
Baughurst RG26 5LU.**

‘Stratfield Saye House - a virtual tour ’

By Michael Aris and Richard Bennett

This will be a return visit to TADS by Michael Aris and Richard Bennett who have previously given talks on the life and campaigns of the Duke of Wellington. It is fitting then that they should now give us a guided tour of the home of one of the country's great military and political figures which was bought for him by a grateful nation

Stratfield Saye house and grounds are only open on a limited number of days each year.

(Everybody welcome - visitors £3.00)

If you wish to stop receiving the Newsletter please email Richard Brown or notify Carol Stevens or a Committee member.

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

www.tadshistory.com

Future TADS events:

Monday 9th September 2024 in Baughurst & Heath End Village Hall:

‘The Complete history of Thatcham’

By Dr Nick Young

TADS Last Meeting 10th June 2024

The Great Train Robbery

by Tony Keep

Nearly 61 years ago a train was held up and robbed of over £2.5 million in used notes, equivalent to £61 m today. Tony is a retired senior police officer who today volunteers at the Thames Valley Police museum at Sulhampstead. As part of his retirement and the 50th Anniversary of the robbery, he decided to research the train robbery using police records and interviews with the officers involved. Tony said there are many books about the robbery but even the best have bits missing and many have particular slants which can be misleading. So what happened?

At that time, 1963, travelling post office trains (TPT) were used for processing mail while they travelled across the country. They could pick up and drop mailbags while on the move. Some of them were also used to move cash from places with a surplus to where it could be put back into circulation. The cash was always carried in a High Value Package coach. These coaches never had any extra security and were **always** the second coach behind the engine. There was no form of communication from that coach to the engine driver or anyone else. On the occasion of the Great Train Robbery the cash was English money that had accumulated in Scotland during the August Bank Holiday (then at the beginning of the month) which was being returned south to the major banks in London.

The robbers had been planning the heist since the beginning of May and must have had inside knowledge of the Post Office and British Rail operations. There is no doubt someone told them the date and time the money would be moved. The TPT left Glasgow at 18.40 on Wednesday 7th August and was due at Euston, London at 03.30 on Thursday 8th August. There was a crew change at Crewe. Driver Jack Mills and 'Fireman' David Whitley took charge of the Class 47 diesel electric locomotive and there were 3 rail staff and 77 Post Office staff on the train.

The gang, dressed as soldiers, manipulated the trackside signals to stop the train on a main line in rural Buckinghamshire, and they had stopped the right train. David Whitley got off the engine and tried to use a trackside phone to ring the nearest signal box, but the gang had cut the wires. He returned to the train to see the robbers disconnecting the carriages and driver Mills being attacked in the engine cab. The gang then tried to move the engine and first 2 coaches to the off-load point, but their own locomotive driver did not know how to drive a large engine of that type so the injured Mills was forced to do it. The off-load point further down the track was at a small bridge over a minor road. The gang threw 120 mail bags weighing a total of 2.5 tons down to men and vehicles waiting below. It was all over by 03.30 and the gang drove off arriving at 04.30 at Leatherslade the remote farm house that they had rented some 28 miles away.

When the stopped train did not move off again the guard investigated, walked to the front of the train and to his great surprise found the engine and two coaches missing. He found a way of contacting the railway signallers and thus the police.

The Police declared it a serious crime, which was fairly enlightened as with the Buckinghamshire Constabulary a bit of chicken rustling would have rated nearly as high. They also got the Metropolitan Police and Scotland yard to help the Buckinghamshire force who would have been completely out of their depth.

The gang had intended to stay at Leatherslade Farm for at least a few days but something spooked them and they left in a hurry leaving far more behind than was sensible. The police were fairly quick in identifying the farm through local Estate Agents, although the copper covering that area was puzzled as to where it might be. He knew it by a completely different name. When the police did get to the farm they found a lot of evidence, including empty mailbags, Landrovers, and a 3 ton truck. They took 300 finger prints

from the surroundings, copious photographs and 2000 items to be used as exhibits.

To say the least, the Post Office and Royal Mail were extremely embarrassed as their security arrangements looked almost non-existent.

The public helped with 200-300 phone calls to the police every day. In all 2,350 statements were collected and in the days before computers 7 copies of each statement had to be made as well as card indexing all the information. Tony said 400 reams of paper were used (200,000 sheets).

Arrests came quickly, 29 people in all. Two of the gang were arrested on the 14th August, only 6 days after the robbery and £140,939 in notes was recovered. In case you wonder, the odd number is possible because the money was all in £1 and £5 notes. Arrests continued steadily through to Christmas 1963, with the last 2 in 1965. Buster Edwards being in Mexico.

Committal proceedings ran from 26th September 1963 to 2nd December and the trial commenced at Aylesbury Assizes in January 1964. The Judge's summary ran to 500,000 words. The going rate was 25 years for conspiracy and 30 years for robbery. 307 years in prison were handed out in all on 16th April 1964.

Of course there was much more told with jail escapes and life abroad for some, including Ronnie Biggs.

Was that the real end of it? Bruce Reynolds was deemed the mastermind and the police believe they got everyone, but it is not certain. What is even stranger is that of the £2,595,997 stolen about £2,000,000 was never recovered. As it was in used £1 notes and fivers of an old design, none of it would be of any use if it turned up today!

Thank you Tony for a very interesting and detailed talk reminding us of the biggest UK robbery until the Brinks-Mat in 1983.

Richard Brown

The Thames valley Police Museum is at Sulhamstead, Nr. Burghfield and is open to the public on Wednesdays from 10 - 12. It will also be open on the first Saturday in September (7th) which is the force's Open Day.



A Travelling Post Office coach with mail drop and catch mechanisms



A Class 47 diesel electric locomotive (*Wikipedia*)

D-Day. 80th Commemorations of 6th June 1944

The TADS D-Day information display was on show at the Tadley Treacle Fair; the Aldermaston History Society event in the Hind's Head; the church service at St Mary's Church, Tadley; and the Tadley U3A Aviation Group.

The display was much admired by many people. Carol and Richard were glad of a rest after this marathon effort.

Natural History Corner



The Silchester Common Saturday morning Working Party cleared the gorse and birch from an area by the Keeper's Cottage in the winter of 22/23. This year there was this stunning display of foxgloves.

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

Milestones Museum The website to buy admission tickets can be found at: <https://www.milestonesmuseum.org.uk/>

20 Jul - 1 Sep **Field to Fork**. Exploring life of the past in the heart of Basingstoke's historic market town, learn more about local agriculture, trade and social history in this summer event!

The Willis Museum and Sainsbury Gallery

May 9 until 28 July - **Karl Blossfeldt: art forms in nature:** a Hayward Gallery touring exhibition featuring 40 photogravures by one of the 20th century's most influential photographers.

July 28, 2 pm – 3.30 pm: Sunday afternoon talk - **A View of the Vyne**, by Chris Burrowes. (followed by tea or coffee and cake) £7.00 and must be booked.

To book go on-line at www.hampshireculture.org.uk/willis-museum, or call in, or phone 01256 465902.

Friends of the Willis Museum (7.30pm at the Museum - Non-members £3, and book through the Museum on 01256 465902)

18 July - **Historic Greenwich**, by Ian Porter.

Basingstoke Archaeological and Historical Society (7.30 at Church Cottage, Basingstoke)

No meetings in July or August.

Thatcham Historical Society will have a talk by Sue Ellis about **Operation Market Garden** on 30th September. This may be of interest as the operation was the attempted taking of the Rhine Bridges in 1944 which was supported by aircraft flying from Aldermaston Airfield.

Details from Carol or Richard.

***TADS annual membership is £20 per person.
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