



June 2006

**Tadley and District History Society
(TADS)**

Next meeting - Wednesday 21st June

St. Paul's Church Hall 8.00 to 9.30 pm

**“Filming Pride and Prejudice at
Basildon Park”**

**by John Simmons, National Trust
House Manager**

(Everybody welcome - visitors £2.00)

Inside this issue:

It's a Monk's Life (or is it?) *(Last month's meeting)*

TADS and local events

TADS Committee news

*Comments, queries and suggestions to Bob Brown, Tadley (0118) 981 6109,
or Richard Brown (0118) 9700100, e-mail: richard@ilexind.plus.com*

www.tadshistory.com

TADS Meeting 19th July

“Tidgrove Warren excavations”

by Mark Leah, Kingsclere Heritage Association

Last month’s meeting (17/5/06):

It’s a Monk’s Life (or is it?)

‘If you go down to St. Cross today you’re sure of a big surprise ...’

How wrong can you be? Brother John from St. Cross Hospital, Winchester, a monk? Never! I am sure many monks can be charismatic, but Brother John had Charisma Plus when he came to see us.

Instead of perhaps a sombre, spiritual fellow we met a switched-on and switched-in Brother, dressed in a charmingly eccentric style, with a long black gown and sporting a big silver cross on his chest, brightening the whole ensemble with a red Marie Claire be-flowered pony tail.

He came, we saw, he conquered. Some 60 of us TADS members eagerly absorbed his every word of spirituality within a relaxed, smiling style of every-day chat and approachability.

Brother John lives with 11 other 60 years plus Black Brothers and a Master at St. Cross, very near Winchester, the Itchen Water Meadows and St. Catherine’s Hill, seemingly so near to Tadley but actually another world away. There are Red Brothers, too, bringing the total to 25.

St. Cross is said to be the oldest charitable institution in the country. It’s a very beautiful collection of mediaeval buildings founded in 1136 when we were going through a very black patch in our history: Civil War, famine and a whole lot of turmoil. So, the then-Bishop of Winchester, who was the King’s brother and grandson of William the Conqueror, hit upon the idea of providing a secure home ‘for 13 poor enfeebled old men where the poor in Christ might humbly and devoutly serve God...’ AND give a daily meal to another 100 poor men. You can still ask for the Wayfarers’ Dole today: beer and bread.

In the past, corruption, controversy and maladministration have nearly closed St. Cross. Some Bishops of Winchester were heavily into nepotism regarding the position of Master; or sold off Hospital properties keeping the loot for themselves. However, in the 15th century there was prosperity and expansion: Cardinal Beaufort added the Almshouses of the Noble Poverty for those ‘who once had everything handsome about them, but had suffered losses...’

So how can you get to be a Black Brother today? (one of our TADS member's grandfathers was one from 1937-1943.) What are the criteria? Well, the other Brothers must approve of you! You must be male; 60 plus years old; ideally in dire straits with no appreciable pension (although one Brother left £250,000 in 1950!); fit enough to look after yourself and your affairs; pay a modest rent for your 3 room centrally heated flat with piped TV—no aerials!—telephone, electricity and panic button. You must be available 6 days a week at 10 am for Matins; ideally be of C. of E. faith but possibly R.C. or U.R.C. However there's even one cross-carrying atheist... You must be in by 10pm when they shut the big gate. You can entertain male or female friends but no sleep-overs. You may smoke in your own flat but no-one else's; you can be a widower or divorcee but couples are no longer eligible. John said often the man dies first and the widow would 'flat-block' the system! Much too complicated.

You don't have to wear your gown and hat if you don't want to, except for Matins because modern Masters accept that swirling gowns get caught in supermarket trolleys as you shop, or bike. John travels by bus. For 'work' you can be a sacristan, a verger, do Guided Tours—or do nothing!

A Master is in charge of the Brothers. Interestingly, the Master before last was Tadley St.Mary's very popular sometime 1970s vicar, the Rev. Tony Outhwaite, now retired. The Master is able to live in the big house at the entrance to St. Cross Drive with his wife and family. He doesn't have to be over 60 years like his charges. How would you be thrown out of the Brotherhood? Well, being drunk and disorderly wouldn't help; or sudden criminal tendencies (it happened) or to quote John, 'losing your moorings' might be catalysts!

Is Brother John happy to be a Brother? Yes, very, he says. One suspects he enjoys talking to Joe Public, living the life, the traditions, but occasionally kicking over the traces just a teeny bit.... Being a St. Cross Brother means spirituality, time to read, to reflect, to be alone, to mix if you want but perhaps not to have any one ORGANISE you.

Any takers for the future? Yes and no. Some may not want the publicity and tourists which go with the address; or even to wear a uniform; or go to Matins daily.

However some like Brother John may live and love the life of quiet yet gentle jollity in an Unenclosed Order which allows what one may consider certain freedoms of choice to be oneself and at peace with oneself.

Thank you, Brother John, for letting us enjoy an insight into your life.

Rosemary Bond

What's On? Local events which may be of interest.

Hampshire Record Office (*'Last Thursday' Lectures 1.15-1.45pm*)

Thursday 29th June. Cellar to search room: rescuing and repairing documents by Caroline Edwards

Milestones Museum

Saturday 24th and Sunday 25th June - **Festival of Firefighting**

See over 50 fire appliances including manual, horsedrawn, steam and diesel powered vehicles from 1766 to the present day.

Weekends of 1st - 2nd, and 8th - 9th July - **Hampshire Food Fare**. Find out how Hampshire food was grown, and taste popular local dishes freshly prepared by a modern-day chef.

Museum of English Rural Life, Reading University.

Until 27th August the museum has an exhibition 'Action women: the real story of the Women's Institutes'. Tel 0118 378 8660 or www.merl.org.uk

Committee News

Outings -David Day has accepted the vacant position of Outings Organiser. He is looking at a coach trip on a Saturday in September, and hopes to be able to tell us the date and destination at Wednesday's meeting.

Wanted An Archivist

Alan Cooke our archivist is leaving the country later this year, and we need a replacement for him. He says the job is not particularly onerous, but does require some computer work using the Excel spreadsheet. Full training given. Details from Alan on
0118 981 4006

*TADS annual membership is £10 per person.
Correspondence to Tadley and District History Society,
PO Box 7264, Tadley. RG26 3FA*