



**December 2019**

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

**Next meeting - Wednesday 18th December 2019  
at St. Paul's Church Hall, 8.00 to 9.30pm**

## **‘Annual General Meeting and Social’**

*The AGM papers will be sent out as a separate email. A limited number of printed copies will be available at the meeting.*

### **AGM Notes:**

#### **Catering at the Social.**

As usual drinks will be provided and members are asked to bring a contribution to the food, both savoury and sweet. Assistance with clearing up and cleaning crockery, etc. will be much appreciated.

#### **Artefacts of interest**

Members are invited to bring items of historic interest for other members to see.

*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 15<sup>th</sup> January 2020**

**‘Beer, Sausages and Marmalade; Food, Drink,  
Politics and Tourism in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Oxford’**

by Liz Woolley

**TADS Meeting 20<sup>th</sup> November 2019**

## **A Celebratory History of Christmas**

By Andy Thomas

We all know about Christmas, don't we? Andy revisited its origins and traditions, telling us the story of how it evolved and was once banned. And what a complicated story it is!

Why do we do certain things at Christmas! Why do we decorate our homes? Changing our environment can change the way we feel, bringing nature and a glow into the winter gloom, something crucial to English people.

There have always been festivals around this time of year – at Stonehenge the mid-winter solstice is more important; Stonehenge was/is a seasonal clock where people gather to mark the solstice even now on a date around 21<sup>st</sup> December. Solstice means 'the sun stands still'. In the past people waited the 4 days running for the sun to return, 25<sup>th</sup> December, to begin its new cycle.

The Egyptians too celebrated at this time of year – the birth of the god Horus to goddess Isis. For complicated reasons, his birth had to be kept secret and he was hidden in rushes. For some this is similar to the Bible story of Moses being hidden – also the birth of Jesus and the necessity to hide him from King Herod. The statue of Horus resting on the lap of Isis has also been compared to the Christian icons of the Madonna and Child.

The Roman god Mithras was sometimes associated with 25<sup>th</sup> Dec. He also had an unconventional birth - no parents. And the god Saturn was celebrated 17<sup>th</sup> - 23<sup>rd</sup> Dec. - Saturnalia – with much drinking and partying. Libanus wrote in the 4<sup>th</sup> C about Kalendae, 1st-3<sup>rd</sup> Jan. and could have been describing a modern Christmas.

As Andy said, you do not need to be a Christian to be moved by the Christmas story, although in the Bible there is no mention of a stable or animals, only a

manger. Wise men are mentioned but these are of a different status, mystics, astrologers but not kings and no names are given.

Christmas Day is the first day of 12 days of feasting etc. when both Roman and Christian festivals came together. The Norsemen's 'Yul' joined the celebrations with decorations of greenery in the home bringing hope and good luck. But you must get the decorations down by 12<sup>th</sup> Night – the greenery is full of spirits up to no good.

The medieval wassailing – be in good health – a hot bowl of spiced punch would be offered with the words 'waes hael' after which a gift of food, money would be given to the wassailers – a way of giving alms to the poor. Remember the carol 'Good King Wenceslas' who, seeing a poor man in the snow, gave him food, wine and fuel on what became known as Boxing Day.

The Christmas of Medieval times was looked forward to as a time of letting go of troubles and enjoying a time of 'misrule', games, forfeits, mummers, cross dressing. Later, pantomime with its cross dressing element contained the last vestiges of 'misrule'.

The time of the Puritans – Cromwell did not like frivolity – was a bleak time – civil wars – a republic – so he BANNED Christmas from 1647 – the ban lasted for 15 years! Sacrilege – it didn't go down well.

With the restoration of the Monarchy, Christmas returned as did Carols - Charles II enjoyed the celebrations although Christmas itself had been damaged and took time to return to its full joy.

The arrival of the Industrial Revolution changed Christmas again, machinery could not be allowed to be idle and workers were lucky to have one day off. For 20 of the years between 1790 and 1835

Christmas was not even mentioned in The Times newspaper.

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Prince Albert arrived from Germany bringing with him the tradition of having a Christmas Tree, setting a trend which continues.

Both Prince Albert and Queen Victoria were concerned at the break-up of families and encouraged family closeness with pictures of their family at Christmas and representations of the Holy Family.

Goose was the traditional bird to be eaten at Christmas. The first Christmas card was printed and sent by Sir Henry Cole in 1843 and the Christmas cracker was invented by Tom Smith in 1847.

Charles Dickens wrote 'A Christmas Carol', a dark book, a ghost story but Andy suggested we read it. "You will really feel the spirit of Christmas".

Father Christmas – the earliest reference, the Norse god Odin flying across the sky on his 8-legged horse bringing gifts. In the early 1800s he is still pagan

looking but by 1881 he is looking happier and St. Nicholas and Father Christmas merge together. Christmas being very different in other parts of the world.

Kissing under the mistletoe began in the 1700s. The Christmas truce of 1914 at the beginning of WW1 was a wonderful thing but only happened in a few places.

The modern 'White Christmas' is rooted in the Northern Hemisphere, the North Pole being where Father Christmas resides and epitomised by Bing Crosby's 1942 'forever' hit song 'White Christmas'.

In the 1950s, especially in the USA money intruded, children were able to see the toys available, but there was also light in the darkness with houses lit up. Shops displayed more goods, suggesting we think of others, make them happy, not ourselves.

A final thought from Andy - without the Christmas festivities winter is long and drab. We need symbols of warmth and light. Stop for a moment of stillness and absorb Christmas, celebrate light in the darkness.

Ann Broad

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### **Visit to the Mary Rose project.**

TADS have been offered the opportunity of a group visit to the special exhibition 'The Many Faces of Tudor England' and the Mary Rose ship in Feb - March. Some people have already expressed interest, but we do need a minimum of 15.

Possible dates are February 26, 27, 28 and March 4.5 & 11.

Carol will have a tabular list for preferences and full details at the AGM. The event will have to be finalised at the January meeting.

Own transport/car share will be required.

**Membership fee** - The committee have decided that the membership fee will remain at £18 per person. The Treasurer will be pleased to take cheques or cash.

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**2020 Meetings Programme** - Jim West and Stephen Barber (a half each) have arranged another very interesting programme for the coming year.

Programme cards will be available at the AGM as usual.

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*The Committee wish all members and supporters a  
Happy Christmas and a Prosperous New Year.*

## ***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>

The museum has two Christmas themed happenings: **Meet the Reindeer** on 23 Dec between 11.45 & 3.45 and **Twixmas Magic** with street magic on 27-29 Dec.

**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 including children's activities in the holidays. *For information tel. 01256 465902 or see <http://hampshireculturaltrust.org.uk/venue-events/52>*

Until 11 Jan - **Lucienne Day: Living Design** - an exhibition celebrating the life and work of one of Britain's most influential post-war designers.

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

16 Jan - **Timber framed buildings of the Worthy Villages** by Bill Fergie

**Basingstoke Archaeological and Historical Society** (*Meetings at Church Cottage at 7.30pm*)

9 Jan - The **Overton Silk Mill Project** by John Mitchell – Heritage Overton

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