



May 2020 (Email only)

TADS Newsletter

Website - www.tadshistory.com

The lock- down continues!

It has not been a good month for past members. So I am very sorry to report that **Bob Brown**, a founder member and ex Chairman/ President of TADS passed away on the 1st of May. He had been in a care home for some considerable time but until shortly before that he had regularly attended TADS meetings. (More information about Bob next month).

David Raymer who with his late wife Josea was for many years a member has also died. David had polio as a boy, but went on to become a circus clown and acrobat. Later he was a farmer in Tadley. He will be buried alongside Josea at Circus Farm.

Another ex-member is **Beryl Sandford**, the partner of the late Alf Rolfe. Beryl attended TADS with Alf for many years.

The meeting via Zoom. On 6th May Tony Hadland, who was to have been our June speaker, gave his talk on William Gill. We had about 30 people logged in to what was a very good talk. Two people failed to log in, but overall it was great success. A full write up is on page 2. Steve recorded the talk and we have it on a memory stick which members can borrow. Please contact me if you want to see it.

Richard

*Comments, queries and suggestions to Richard Brown (0118) 9700100,
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www.tadshistory.com

Future TADS talks

All talks at St. Paul's Hall have been cancelled until July and it is looking increasingly unlikely that we will be able to resume even then.

However we were very encouraged by the response and execution of this month's talk using Zoom, which was very much an experiment. There is an intention to continue with on-line talks if possible. I will give you as much notice as I can when the next one is organised.

TADS Online Meeting 16th May 2020

William Gill – a Victorian Explorer and Spy By Tony Hadland

Oral family tradition said that Tony was related to someone famous. It took many years to prove it, but it was his Great, Great Uncle William Gill who was born in Bangalore, India in 1843 to an Indian Army family.

William and his siblings came to England for schooling accompanied by their Mother, leaving their father in India and free to take two Indian mistresses who bore him more children and he never did return to England.

William went to Brighton College where he was a good scholar and left in 1861 to join the Royal Engineers at the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich. It seems that he remained attached to the Army, but never in regular postings. An 1869 sketch book shows that he visited Scotland and was a competent artist. Shortly after that he visited India, and on his return a distant relative left him a real fortune and this was key to his travels. (He still had £7 million at the time of his death).

Aged 30, his first expedition was to Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Persia (Iran) with the experienced traveller Valentine Baker. Tony's map showed that they went all over the place, a real baptism of fire. On his return home Gill stood as Tory candidate for Hackney which was then a safe Liberal seat. He did well but was not returned and a second attempt to be an MP in Nottingham was also unsuccessful.

With plenty of money he was free to do what he wanted, so when a friend he met in Trafalgar Square mentioned China that is where he went next. First he

went to Berlin to consult an expert on China, Baron Ferdinand Richthofen, whose nephew is more famous – the ‘Red Baron’, the WWI German ace fighter pilot. From Berlin, Gill went straight off to China via Marseilles and Hong Kong to Tianjin and Peking (Beijing). He was now aged 32. His expedition was also for gathering Military Intelligence. He made a five week expedition seeing the Great Wall, going to Inner Mongolia and back to Peking. He made lots of sketches on route and sent his diaries back to London by post! The sketches were made into drawings by professional artists in London and used to illustrate his books.

He had intended to return home from China overland but diplomatic relations with Russia were unsettled, so instead he went up the Yangtze River, around the edge of Tibet and down through Burma. He received help from French Catholic Missionaries. His book illustrations show bridges, scenery and lots of small roadside Joss Houses (small shrines not doss houses).

The travelling party was Gill, a servant, a dog, a pony, a pony boy and 20 coolies for the luggage. The luggage apparently included good supplies of Worcester Sauce, an essential for travelling Victorian gentlemen. From Chengdu, he made a 400 mile circuit in the mountains of Sichuan which was all new to Westerners.

As he had been travelling rather light, the number of coolies was increased to 60 for the main expedition and he had a new companion called Mesny a Jersey man who had gone native. While travelling on the Tibetan Plateau they were at an elevation of nearly 15,000 ft. They surveyed the whole route, later publishing maps at a scale of 2 miles to the inch, as well as the books with their copious illustrations.

On his return to London Gill was awarded a medal by the Royal Geographical Society and another medal by the French. He was also appointed a Military Intelligence Officer.

On the strength of these journeys he was sent to Russian occupied Romania with a friend. Their cover was very thin and they were arrested and thrown out.

Next was a short trip to Constantinople (Istanbul) where he again met Valentine Baker, who was now working for the Turks.

In 1880 Gill was asked to report to the Government on the strength of the Chinese Army. The note books came in very handy and he concluded that their strength was far from great.

Do you know that great big lion in the Forbury Gardens in Reading? It commemorates the many men of the Royal Berkshire Regiment killed at Maiwand in Afghanistan in August 1880. (British armed forces have never done well out there). Gill was sent to help the survivors of the Anglo Indian

forces who were holed up in Quandahar. Travelling by train and ferry he was too late for the relief of the city, so he joined an expedition into Pakistan and afterwards went solo to Turkmenistan. The Russians noticed and complained, so London called him home. He returned by way of Moscow!

In 1881 he went on a self-financed intelligence gathering mission to North Africa.

In 1882 he went on what was to be his final journey, this time to Egypt with a Professor Palmer as an advisor. He was told to liaise with the Bedouins. They found that nationalists were tapping into an important telegraph line, so they decided to cut it. But they were betrayed and all the party were executed out in the desert. There was a huge search to find out what had happened. Bones and other things were recovered and brought home to England.

On Wednesday 4th of April 1883, the Gill party was buried at St. Paul's cathedral in London. William Gill was only 38 years old. Was the party's cook the only Jew ever buried in St. Paul's wondered Tony?

William Gill is commemorated in Memorials and Scholarships at Brighton College and by a Royal Geographical Society Medal. The Royal Geographical Society hold all of Gill's numerous diaries.

Thank you Tony for your fascinating talk about an extraordinary man, who should be better known. What an ancestor to have.

Richard Brown

Tony's book about William Gill is now out of print, but it may be downloaded as a pdf from Tony's website. Much of the book quotes Gill's own words. The website is:

<https://hadland.wordpress.com/category/william-gill/>

The link to get the pdf is at the bottom of the page.

NB. I have mostly used the spelling of place names used by the speaker. Names do vary over the years and I hope they are understandable.



VE Day

Ian has done a lot of work adding information about VE day to the website. This is his flyer encouraging you to look at it.



The flyer features a large, stylized '75' in white, set against a red and blue background that resembles a flag. The '7' is formed by a red triangle pointing down and a blue triangle pointing up, while the '5' is formed by a red triangle pointing down and a blue triangle pointing up. Below the '75' is a circular callout with a red border containing text and social media icons. At the bottom, the words 'VE DAY' are written in large, bold, red letters, followed by '75TH ANNIVERSARY' in black, 'A SHARED MOMENT OF CELEBRATION' in black, and '8 - 10 MAY 2020' in black.

Check out
**Tadley and District
History Society's**
VE DAY website
[www.tadshistory.com/
ve-day-8-may-2020/](http://www.tadshistory.com/ve-day-8-may-2020/)

 

VE DAY
75TH ANNIVERSARY
A SHARED MOMENT OF CELEBRATION
8 - 10 MAY 2020

TADS New Website

Steve D spent most of a night transferring the new website to the TADS domain name: www.tadshistory.com. It was supposed to just take one 'click'. That is computing! It is a good thing that apparently he does not sleep as much as the rest of us.

He is working on making the site able to sell memberships and our books

Do have a look at the website, it is growing all the time.

Social Media

Another innovation by Steve is to create TADS Facebook, Twitter and Instagram accounts to improve the Society's profile. These are all linked to the website and Neil F is doing much of the posting.

TADS Logo

As a part of building the new website Steve and Ian have made a new logo for TADS. It still retains the balloon and as you saw on page one it is in colour. For newer members the significance of the balloon is explained on the website. Tadley, God help us!

An e-Book about the Liner Titanic

Rupert Matthews who spoke to us about the Battle of Waterloo in 2015 has written a book about the actions following Titanic sinking called 'Saving the Survivors'. The book is 70 pages long in big type with lots of pictures.

He has kindly sent us a pdf file which can be read on screen or printed. I will put the file as an attachment to the email covering this newsletter.

Internet Search Results:

The **Tadley Mustang**. (*A WWII aeroplane not a horse*).

Steve D found an article about this aeroplane which is still somewhere in the Tadley/Baughurst area. Here is the web address:

www.rchs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/336-Tadley-Mustang.pdf

Alex Flahive searched the British Museum online exhibits and on entering the word Tadley found a Bronze Age gold metal strip. It seems to be the oldest thing found round Tadley.

To see it go to:

<https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/search?place=Tadley>

And finally since William Gill went to Constantinople he would have seen the fabulous Blue Mosque as we did in 20016.



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