

**December 2020**

## **TADS Newsletter**

Website - [www.tadshistory.com](http://www.tadshistory.com)

**A vaccine. A light at the end  
of the tunnel?**

**Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> December at 8 pm**

### **‘TADS Annual General Meeting’**

Due to the continuing Covid-19 situation the meeting will be held using Zoom in this strange year. Please note that we intend to hold a quiz after the formal part of the meeting.

A set of papers for the meeting has already been sent out as a separate email, or hard copy where appropriate. The email also had the Zoom joining instructions.

*If you need help using Zoom, the TADS Website has information and a contact number.*

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

## **Future TADS talks**

**20<sup>th</sup> January 2021@ 8p.m**

**‘The Windsor Chair: The remarkable story of our  
National chair’  
by Stewart Linford**

Due to the on-going Covid restrictions this will be held via Zoom.

*If you need help using Zoom the TADS Website has information and a contact number.*

## **TADS Zoom Talk on 18<sup>th</sup> November 2020**

### **Poisons for Medicine By Graham Harrison**

Who would use poisons as medicine? Well the Victorians certainly did as Graham told us in his amusing and interesting talk, seemingly in large quantities. But before we chuckle too much, we must not forget that many of the drugs we take so readily today can be lethal if the recommended dose is exceeded. Not just prescription items but over the counter tablets of which paracetamol is a prime example.

The Victorian period saw rapid change in medicines as science moved from alchemy to the first of the modern style medicines. Since there was no government regulation of any type, the field was open to quacks and charlatans of all sorts. There was no testing or recording of side effects so providers could make fortunes, or run from their terrible mistakes. Medicines could be bought anywhere and were often sold by street traders. Some well known companies started at this time including Boots.

Advertising was also completely uncontrolled, you could make any claim you like. Advertisements played on fear or power of suggestion. Some things today come across as utterly bizarre: for fat reduction, take sanitized tape worms; for asthma, use special cigarettes. Many products contained Coca (from which cocaine is derived) e.g. 'Forced March' tablets marketed by a company called Burroughs Wellcome. (Whatever became of them?) 'Coca Wine for fatigue of

mind and body' fell foul of the temperance movement because of the word 'wine' so they changed the name to Coca Cola and never looked back.

Many of you will have heard the song Lily the Pink sung many years ago by The Scaffold -

'We'll drink a drink, a drink  
To Lily the Pink, the Pink, the pink  
The saviour of the human race  
For she invented medicinal compound  
Most efficacious in every case'

The Scaffold were not making it up. Lydia E Pinkham's Herbal Medicine, was a vegetable compound which would cure 'Female Problems' and **everything** else!! Whatever it contained, 20% was alcohol but as the label didn't list alcohol as an ingredient the Temperance Movement didn't object to it. Lily was a shrewd business woman and made a personal response to every letter the company received from its customers. It must have been good stuff as she managed to keep writing the letters for 15 years after her death. Believe it or not products under the Lydia E Pinkham label are still available but apparently without the alcohol.



In reality the relief of pain was a very important thing and cocaine was an anaesthetic. Hence such products as Allenbury's Cocaine Throat Pastilles which also contained diamorphine or Cocaine Toothache Drops for children. Opium was used as a relief for gastric problems and malaria. It was also used in quantity by farm workers (anything to make life seem better) perhaps as powder to sprinkle on beer or the drink 'Poppy ale'. Opium poppies could be grown in gardens without fear of the police descending in force. Laudenum was much favoured by Victorian writers and artists. It was a tincture of opium, usually mixed with brandy. It was very addictive and dangerous, three teaspoons of it was fatal for non-users. Above all it was cheaper than gin. As late as 1898, the German company Bayer marketed a non-addictive pain relief which was mostly heroin!! Arsenic also had medicinal uses as a cure for worms, morning sickness and anything else you like to name. Fowler's Solution patent medicine was 10% arsenic.

As a contrast 'Clarke's World Famous Blood Mixture' would cure any skin complaint. Other than as a placebo it was completely ineffective but not dangerous as it was just water coloured with burnt sugar, and not much else.

Useless it might have been but it was massively profitable for the manufacturers.

Strychnine is another well known poison. If used correctly it can be a cure for opium addiction. (Not to be tried at home). And it had other effects. In the 1904 Olympics Marathon (St Louis, USA), Thomas Hicks the favourite from the USA was flagging at 16 miles, but multiple doses of strychnine mixed with brandy got him to the finish in second place. He was in such a state that he was carried over the line and nearly died. Today we would regard this as cheating but not as much as the original winner who was disqualified for doing 10 miles of the course in a taxi!

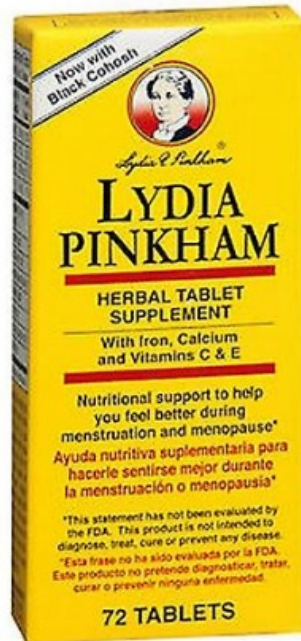
Another good product was 'One Night Cough Syrup' which only contained alcohol, cannabis and chloroform. Cure or kill? Graham said people must have been tough to survive illnesses or the cure and thank God for the NHS. Who can disagree?

Thank you Graham for a very interesting and colourful talk about times that were not that long ago.

Richard Brown



Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University



Lydia Pinkham's original vegetable compound and modern tablets

## **TADS 2021 Programme**

- 20 January - The Windsor Chair: The remarkable story of our National chair by Stewart Linford
- 17 February - The Battle of the Somme: the blackest day in the history of the British Army by Phil Wood.
- 17 March - The History of Smelly Alley, Reading and the decline of fishmongers by Kevin Little.
- 21 April - Flying the Vulcan Bomber – a personal perspective by Sqn. Ldr. Joe Marsden.
- 19 May - 1752 and All That: the derivation of the modern calendar by Mark Bowman.
- 16 June - The great Sandhurst to Sandhurst walk: a 180 mile walk along Roman roads, past historic sights by Graham Harding.
- 21 July - The Pursuit & Sinking of Bismarck. (2021 sees the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this event) by David Bickerton.
- 15 September - The History of Houses: the development of the house from Open Hall to modern home by Trevor Ottlewski.
- 20 October - John the Painter: Arson in His Majesty's Dockyard by Alan Turton.
- 18 November - Kings, Boxes and Dots: The history of the Royal Mail and Post Offices by John Rogers

This very interesting looking programme has been arranged by Sephen Barber. All the speakers for at least the first part of the year, are able to give their presentations using Zoom or in the hall. Lets hope it will not be too long before we can have much more social meetings in St Paul's hall.

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

*The local museums are open once again, Both Milestones and the Willis now have a booking system in place. So book before you go. I would suggest that for anywhere you intend visiting, you find out what conditions are in place before leaving home.*

**Milestones Museum.** *For coming events tel. 01256 477766 or see <https://www.milestonesmuseum.org.uk/>*

The museum has Christmas themed events running both before and after Christmas.

**Willis Museum -** *For information tel. 01256 465902 or see <https://www.hampshireculture.org.uk/willis-museum-and-sainsbury-gallery>*

The Sunday Times Watercolour Competition 2020 shortlist and winners are on view at the museum until 16<sup>th</sup> January 2021.

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*The Committee wish everyone a happy  
Christmas and a much better New Year*

*But above all*

*TAKE CARE AND STAY WELL*

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