



February 2021

TADS Newsletter

Website - www.tadshistory.com

**Still in lock down 3, but
vaccinations are proceeding at
an amazing rate.**

Wednesday 17th February at 8 pm via Zoom

‘The Battle of the Somme’

By Phil Wood

The first day of the battle remains the worst day in the history of the British Army, when it suffered 57,470 casualties, around 20,000 of whom were killed. After a series of attacks and counter attacks, including the first use of tanks on September 15, poor weather stopped the Somme Offensive on November 18, 1916. The British and French had gained 12km of ground.

The log in details for the talk will be sent in a separate email. Non-members please sign up through the TADS Website. £3.00.

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

*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 talks

17th March 2021@ 8p.m

‘The History of Smelly Alley, Reading and the decline of fishmongers ’ by Kevin Little

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

TADS Zoom Talk on 20th January 2021

The Windsor Chair By Stuart Linford

Stewart, a Londoner, was interested in woodwork from before he was 8 years old and not interested in much else. Thanks to an enlightened school master (who was not the careers master) he found out about High Wycombe and went there aged 18. At that time there were still about 50 furniture firms including Gomm (G-Plan) and Ercol. Stewart studied for 3 years at the High Wycome Technical College and came out wanting to make furniture and “otherwise unemployable”. He took the bold step of starting his own business in an unused pigsty on a farm. “Making money is difficult. It is best to start without any”. Thirty five years later his furniture making firm has 40 employees, so his enthusiasm has paid off.

The Windsor chair has probably been made for well over 300 years in the woods and workshops of the Chiltern Hills centred on High Wycome. At the peak, about 1910, there were 200 factories in High Wycome making 4000 chairs a day. Today there is almost nothing left of the furniture industry and the town is better known for its supermarkets.

The traditional chair has a seat made of elm, which is very resistant to splitting, into which all the other parts are inserted in holes round two or three of its edges, depending on the design. It usually has a hooped back made from steamed ash or sometimes beech. The legs, stretchers (the rails holding the legs apart), and the

vertical rails in the back are all made of beech. These parts are all waisted outwards at the centre. The back may have a flat, pierced, centre panel called a splat. There are a great many variations of the design including the comb-back which has a curved board at the top of the back instead of the hoop. If you go to New England variations of the Windsor chair abound in the older houses as the design was taken over the Atlantic by the early settlers.

The elm seats were made by bottomers, and in St Paul's church yard in London, the wealthy could have a seat shaped to fit their own bottom. The shaping was done with an adze with a curved cutting edge. The beech parts were made by bodgers working in the beech woods of the Chilterns. They would buy a stand of beech woods and live in a hut in the woods while they worked. The cut lengths of beech were split into billets for the legs using a froe driven by a beetle (large wooden mallet). They were then partially rounded using a side axe and then a draw knife and shave horse, in the same way as the Tadley besom makers shaped the broom handles. The parts were turned to size and shape on a pole lathe and then sold to the factories.

Incidentally, Stewart said the name bodger in this context does not mean someone who does a shoddy job but may be to do with the word 'botch', a tear or a fault in wood. Shakespeare apparently used it in the common meaning.

So how do you make a living making traditional furniture? Limited Editions have been the answer for Stewart. His 'Millenium' chair of 1999 saw 99 sold at £1250 each. He obtained a lump of oak from HMS Victory and used it to make the back of the 'Admiral's' chair of which 150 were sold at £3500 each, but they did take three years to make. The recent offering is the 'Churchill' chair. As befits the great man it has a cigar drawer made of Spanish cedar and Blenheim oak built into the seat, a double H stretcher on which a bowler hat will rest and a brass plate made from a WWII shell case on the underside of the seat. The plate is inscribed with Churchill's last speech. Cue for Stewart to do his very good imitation of Churchill's 'Finest Hour' speech. You can buy one of these chairs for a lot of money and it will probably be a good investment.

Stewart's motto - "Wood nourishes the soul from the cradle to the grave".

Thank you Stewart for a very interesting and funny talk. There is far more to wooden chairs than you might think.

Richard Brown

While doing some research for the report I found this quote:

'The chair is a very difficult object. Everyone who has tried to make one knows that. There are endless possibilities and many problems - the chair has to be light, it has to be strong, it has to be comfortable. It is almost easier to build a skyscraper than a chair. That is why Chippendale is famous.' Mies van der Rohe, 1930.

Mies van der Rohe was a German-American architect. Along with Alvar Aalto, Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius and Frank Lloyd Wright, he is regarded as one of the pioneers of modernist architecture and also designed the Barcelona chair - Wikipedia



Comb back Windsor chair
of c1775



Stickback Windsor Chair by
Stewart Linford

Using a froe to split
a billet of wood





A modern shave horse showing how the wood is gripped by pushing with the legs and the draw knife is pulled towards the user.

Annual Subscriptions

A thank you to the many people who have paid for another year of membership. For those of you who have not yet paid, annual subscriptions of £20 are now becoming overdue. They may be paid online through the TADS Website - www.tadshistory.com, or you can send a cheque to Christine Poile at 34 Otterbourne Crescent, Tadley. RG26 3UJ.

Two friends of TADS

I am sorry to have to report the recent deaths of two ladies, who while not members of TADS had been long time supporters.

The first was Jean Burn, mother of our Ian. Jean was a very good typist and gave a lot of help in preparing some of the earlier TADS books.

The second was Vickie Ward, widow of Derek. Apart from keeping Derek functioning, Vickie for some years helped by typing Rosemary's meeting reports.

Our condolences go to their families.



A reminder of warmer times. A Southern Hawker dragonfly taken in our garden last September. Trying to photograph flying dragonflies is a frustrating exercise, this is the best result so far.

A local quiz by Valerie Gilbert (Answers on last page)

1. What is the population of Tadley, to the nearest 500.?
2. What year was Reading Abbey established?
3. Who is buried there?
4. Which year did the shopping centre, the Oracle, open?
5. During the Civil War, what was Reading's main industry?
6. What are the 3 B's that Reading was famous for?
7. How many Churches are there in Tadley? (Do not include Baughurst or Pamber Heath)
8. Which variety of Pear originated in Aldermaston in the 1700s?
9. The first petrol filling station in England was in Aldermaston. Do you know what is still there today that denotes that?
10. What are the two Breweries that were in Reading?

Bombs and Berkshire Towns

What is it about Berkshire towns? You may remember that John Betjeman had it in for Slough in his 1937 poem which starts:

Come, friendly bombs, and fall on Slough
It isn't fit for humans now,
There isn't grass to graze a cow
Swarm over, Death!

But Reading is not to be left out. In 1951 a Dr Mendelsohn commented:

“There would be no protection against an atomic bomb dropped on Reading, except that such a bomb was expensive and Reading might not be considered a sufficiently worthwhile target.”

Was he right? Well, so far nobody has dropped an atomic bomb on Reading!

If anyone wants the whole of the Slough poem, I can send it to you - RB.

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

Everything is shut down again until who knows when.

Meanwhile here are details of four on-line Zoom talks which may be of interest:

5000 Finds from West Berkshire. Sat 20 Feb at 7pm - 8pm. Free

Folklore, Myths and Legends of West Berkshire. 24 Feb, 7-8pm. £5.00

Arms and Armour of the Civil Wars and the Littlecote House Collection. Wed 3rd Mar, 1:00 - 2:00 pm. Free

Archaeology in West Berkshire. Wed. 10 Mar, 7:00 - 8:00pm. Free

Tickets must be pre-booked for all talks via:

https://booking.westberks.gov.uk/heritage_events.html

Quiz answers

- | | |
|--|---------------------------|
| 1. 11,500 | 2. 1121 |
| 3. Henry 1 | 4. 1999 |
| 5. Cloth | 6. Biscuits, Beer, Bulbs |
| 7. 9 | 8. The William Pear |
| 9. A hole in the brickwork just as you go down the high street, on the left hand side. | 10. Simmonds and Courage. |

TAKE CARE AND STAY WELL

***TADS annual membership is £20 per person.
Correspondence to Tadley and District History Society,
c/o 5 Church Road Pamber Heath Tadley. RG26 3DP
Email: tadshistory@googlemail.com***