

September 2021

TADS Newsletter

Website - www.tadshistory.com

Things are much better.

Wednesday 15th September at 8 pm via Zoom *

‘The History of Houses’

By Trevor Ottlewski

In the 19th century many town and city workers were housed in squalid and unsanitary tenement buildings. These were often back to back blocks with no running water, no lighting, no main drainage, where maybe as many as 100 people might share the use of a single toilet. Some people of influence, however, began to realise that good living conditions were not just for the privileged classes, and that by creating healthy conditions for employees, the workforce would be more productive. Things changed for the better

The log in details for the talk will be sent in a separate email.

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

* Please see page 2.

*Comments, queries and suggestions to Richard Brown (0118) 9700100,
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TADS Meetings

With the easing of Covid-19 restrictions we intended to get back to face to face meetings at St. Paul's Church Hall this month. We were scuppered by the speaker who wished to stick to Zoom. October is looking possible but we may have to meet in the church. Look out for our emails.

The Committee.

Future TADS talks

20th October 2021@ 8pm in St. Paul's Church ??

**'John the Painter: Arson in His Majesty's
Dockyard'**

By Alan Turton

TADS Zoom Talk on 21st July 2021

The Pursuit and Sinking of the Bismarck

By David Bickerton

David related the tale of the sinking of German battleship Bismarck which was a dramatic episode of World War II. His great interest is because his father was serving on one of the Royal Navy ships.

The end of World War I was followed by the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 when the victors imposed severe limits on the arms that Germany could have, including warships. Hitler came to power in 1933 and in 1935 negotiated an Anglo-German treaty which allowed the Germans to have 5 capital ships. One of these was the Bismarck, 52,000 tons in weight, carrying eight 15inch guns and launched in 1939, a potentially formidable ship.

In May 1941, nineteen months into the Second World War, the Bismarck and cruiser Prinz Eugen were docked in Poland. The Germans wanted to get them into the North Atlantic to join in the attacks on the convoys supplying

Britain. The damage they could have done to Britain being able to survive is almost incalculable. The two ships left the Baltic on the 19th May but were spotted by the Swedes who alerted the British. After a short stop at Bergen, Norway, where they were seen by a British aircraft, they sailed north of Iceland and into the Denmark Strait close to the Greenland icepack. The British cruisers Suffolk and Norfolk saw them on 23rd May. The following morning the 25 year old British battlecruiser Hood and brand new light battleship Prince of Wales (with some Camel Laird shipyard workers still on board) reached the Denmark Strait having sailed from the Scapa Flow anchorage in Orkney, and met the two German ships. Everyone opened fire. The Bismarck was hit but the Germans were the more successful. After only eight minutes the lightly armoured Hood was hit, exploded and sank with only 3 survivors from the crew of 1,419 men. The German ships then turned their fire on the Prince of Wales which was badly damaged and limped away after only another two minutes. The loss of the 'Mighty' Hood coupled with bad news from Crete was a blow to British morale.

The British ships had damaged the Bismarck and its speed was reduced to 22 knots. Captain Lindemann wanted to return to Germany as all surprise had been lost and there was doubt about their continuing fighting ability. He was over-ruled by Admiral Lutjens who ordered him to go to Brest in German held western France and at the same time sent the Prinz Eugen off for independent action. The Suffolk and Norfolk with the Prince of Wales managed to keep shadowing the battleship and late on the 24th May the British commander, Admiral Tovey, got the aircraft carrier Victorious into a position to launch an air attack with nine Swordfish biplanes. In very poor conditions, with heavy cloud, the aircraft launched eight torpedoes. Only one hit the Bismarck doing little damage, but the attack further unsettled the German Admiral. All the Swordfish got back and landed on Victorious.

At 3am on the 25th May the shadowing ships lost radar contact with the Bismarck and she disappeared. It was not until more than day later at 10.30am on the 26th that a Catalina flying boat sighted the ship. The sighting was confirmed by Swordfish from the aircraft carrier Ark Royal. By now British warships were converging from several directions unknown to the Germans who were confident they could make the remaining 400+ miles to Brest. In the early afternoon Ark Royal launched 14 Swordfish to attack the Bismarck. The weather conditions were atrocious and with only a radar contact the aircraft attacked a ship sailing below the thick cloud. It was the cruiser HMS Sheffield who miraculously was not hit by any of the 11 torpedoes. All the aircraft safely

returned to the carrier and were readied for another attack, this time well aware that the Sheffield was closely shadowing the Bismarck. They took off again at 7pm in a full gale with heavy rain squalls and the carrier's deck pitching wildly in the stormy sea. Guided by Sheffield, the 15 Swordfish attacked the Bismarck, flying into a hail of gunfire at only 80 knots. 13 torpedoes were launched but only three hit the German ship, one of which crippled her steering gear and she was seen to turn two complete circles as she reduced speed to about 8 knots. Shortly after 5 ships of the Royal Navy 4th Destroyer Flotilla appeared out of the murk and made repeated torpedo attacks throughout the night. Just before midnight Admiral Lutjens signalled to Hitler that the ship was doomed, but they would fight to the last.

Dawn on the 27th May was clear which did not bode well for the already crippled warship and at 8.30am the British battleships Rodney and King George V appeared from the west and shortly afterwards opened fire. They were joined by the heavy cruiser Dorsetshire which launched torpedoes and the Bismarck sank at 10.40am 300 miles west of Brest. The Dorsetshire and the destroyer Maori stayed to pick up German survivors but did not linger as they were very concerned about the possibility of U-Boat attacks. In all 115 survived out of an original crew of more than 2,300.

David said that more than 100 Royal Navy ships were involved in the whole action, and that even today there are unanswered questions. The Bismarck's companion, the heavy cruiser Prinz Eugen, refuelled at sea and reached Brest on 1st June. It was later involved in the infamous 'Channel dash' of February 1942.

Thank you David for your stirring tale of one of WWII's pivotal actions, which if the Royal Navy had not prevailed might have meant an early end to British resistance to the Germans. War is not a nice business.

During questions, TADS Treasurer Christine revealed that her Father-in-Law was on HMS Suffolk at the time.

Richard Brown



The German battleship Bismarck

A new Information Board in Tadley

Funded by Tadley Town Council, the TADS Committee has designed and commissioned an information board which is to be sited at the small memorial garden which is at the bottom of Mulford's Hill behind the bus stop on the New Road side. The board explains why the Memorial Garden is there and the history of the Tadley War Memorial which was once sited nearby.

The board is to be unveiled on Saturday 25th September at 2.30pm. TADS members are invited to attend.

Planning

Lidl have won their planning appeal and can go ahead with building a new store on the corner of Saunders Field opposite the ex-Barclays Bank building.

We also understand that the McCarthy and Stone sheltered housing development will be going ahead on the Reading Warehouses site.

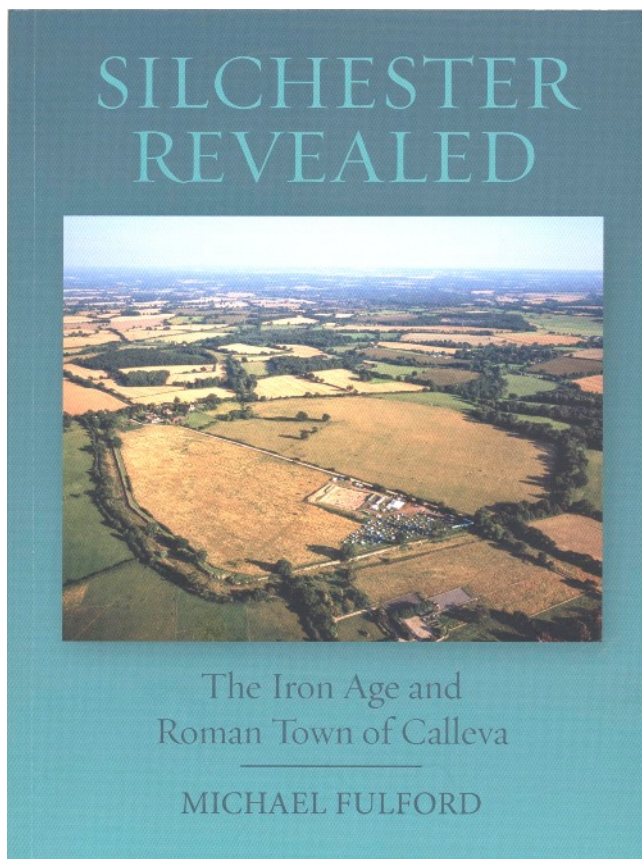


The Reading Lion

I expect many of you will recognise this splendid statue which is in Reading's Forbury Gardens. It is even appears as a background shot in the introduction to the BBC 'South Today' news programme. But do you know why it is there? It is a memorial to the 328 officers and men of the 66th Berkshire Regiment who were killed at the Battle of Maiwand in Afghanistan in July 1880 during the Second Afghan War. Nearly 1000 British and Indian soldiers died in the campaign.

There have been three further excursions into Afghanistan including that of the last 20 years which has just ended in a shambolic withdrawal. The tribesmen appear to have come out on top every time. It would seem that our politicians and generals don't study history.

Historic Silchester



Professor Fulford used his time during the pandemic lockdown to write this book about the current state of knowledge of the Calleva Iron Age and Roman site. It was published earlier this year.

I have found it very readable and it is generously illustrated with maps, diagrams and photographs to compliment the text. If you are interested in historic Silchester it is a must read.

Richard B

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

Milestones Museum is open. The website to buy admission tickets online and pre-book a day and time to visit can be found at:

<https://www.milestonesmuseum.org.uk/>

A new attraction is Mr Simpson's Teddy Bear Museum with 260 bears on display.

The Willis Museum and Sainsbury Gallery is open with a few restrictions. <https://www.hampshireculture.org.uk/willis-museum-and-sainsbury-gallery>

A new Free exhibition is open until 16 October 2021: **The Magic of Middle-earth** - Journey beyond the books to discover the artistic legacy of J.R.R. Tolkien's incredible fantasy world.

Friends of the Willis Museum (7.30pm at the Museum - Non-members £3, and book through the Museum on 01256 465902)

16th Sept. **The Suffragettes** by Diana White

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

14th October - **The Writing on the Wall** – looking at the work and findings of the Hampshire Medieval Graffiti Project by Karen Wardley – Co-ordinator for the Hampshire Medieval Graffiti Project

Continue to take care.

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