



February 2024

TADS Newsletter

Website - www.tadshistory.com

**Next Meeting - Monday 12th February 2024 at 8 pm, at
Baughurst and Heath End Village Hall, Heath End Road,
Baughurst RG26 5LU.**

‘Railways in Victorian Berkshire’

by Richard Marks

The railways came to Berkshire in the middle of the nineteenth century and according to history changed everything and created huge growth in the local economy. But did they ? The railways became an important part of the Berkshire landscape and were certainly important but how important, and when ? How did a town like Wantage by-passed by the Great Western Railway survive ? What did the people of Berkshire use the trains for and how did the railway companies get on with each other ? Find the answers to all these questions and more in this talk.

(Everybody welcome - visitors £3.00)

If you wish to stop receiving the Newsletter please email Richard Brown or notify Carol Stevens or a Committee member.

*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 events:

Monday 11th March 2024 in Baughurst & Heath End Village Hall:

‘The Versailles Treaty: failure or folly’

By Colin Oates

TADS Last Meeting 8th January 2024

‘Welcome to my World’

by William French – butler to the Royal Family & others.

Not a 9 a.m. - 5 p.m. job. Or even Monday – Friday. Surely a butler’s life must be very off-beat and interesting. And busy.

From his Buckinghamshire home 15 yr old William got his older brother to forge their Mum’s signature and went off to join the Royal Navy – as a chef, then a steward, and part-time a gunner. Even at Northwood, Middlesex, life wasn’t dull and there was even a bunker 16 floors down with an escape tunnel to Ruislip.

Next came the Falklands Conflict (1982) and William found himself in the thick of the action at the age of 17 and experienced gruesome sights and happenings. His gunnery training came in very useful. His was one of 127 ships (we only have 15 now in 2024!) *(The Navy claim 68 ships and submarines in commissioned operation but some are very small. Also HMS Victory counts as one! - ed)*

As a complete change William later worked on the ‘beautiful’ Royal Yacht, Britannia – you had to walk barefoot (or wear ‘jimmies’) so no one was disturbed. He said Queen Elizabeth didn’t like ODD numbers for dinner, and so there were always 64-100 people dining. Britannia’s double garage was used to store the

ship's supply of beer barrels.....

His Far East trips sounded interesting – one could meet ‘lady-boys’ who really did look like glamorous women. As well as poking the Duke of Edinburgh in the eye with his umbrella, William escorted the Royal Family in China. He found South Africa's Nelson Mandela very humble and good company; also the Sultan of Brunei whom he met while with Charles and Diana. Charles needed the double garage for his Aston Martin displacing the crew's beer, which was not popular. William still treasures a photo he took of Princess Diana at this time (1980s). Princess Alexandra was always good company and amusing; and the Duke of Edinburgh called the Queen by her pet-name ‘Cabbage’. When William became ‘Breakfast Butler’ to the Queen in civilian life he had to ensure fresh friesias were enveloped in her daily tray napkin.

As well as working for our Royals, William also worked for the Saudi Royals; Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman and others. Apparently one of his tasks was to ‘adjust’ Nicole's underwear, should there be no one else to do it..... like putting ‘chicken fillets’ (pads) into her bra. AND looking after her 2 children. He has also worked with Paul O'Grady, Darcy Bussell, Susan Calman, Carol Kirkwood, Jennie Bond (former Royal Correspondent) and the Calendar Girls from Yorkshire..... For 15 years he worked for the 3rd Viscount Rothermere until his death.

An interesting and busy life can have its downsides; William volunteered the information that one night he came home early from work – to find his own wife in bed with a neighbour! He also said that many of the famous men he worked for had mistresses.

William's story reads that the life of some butlers is always lively and unexpected – but how much excitement can one take over a prolonged period?!

Thank you, William, for your lively talk about your mentally and physically demanding life as a butler.....

Rosemary Bond.



The lounge of the Royal Yacht Britannia now in Leith, Scotland.
Photo by RB

TADS Membership Subscriptions.

TADS membership is by annual subscription. Subscriptions are now due. We have a membership form which combines a member's information and agreement on the use of member's data (often referred to as the GDPR requirement). Copies of the form will be available at TADS meetings and can be downloaded from the TADS website.

We ask members to complete the form and return it, signed and dated, to TADS Treasurer, Christine Poile. The form includes a number of payment options, please follow the instructions for your chosen option.

You can also renew your membership subscription when attending one of our forthcoming meetings February or March 2024.

Becoming Roman - Silchester a town of Change is a new free exhibition at the Willis Museum, Basingstoke, from 10th Feb to 27th April. It has been curated by Professor Mike Fulford of Reading University who has spent most of his career excavating the remains of the Roman town.

In this interactive exhibition you can explore the streets of ancient Silchester as it changes from and Iron Age to Roman town. The town was abandoned around AD 400 and never had layers of later buildings built over earlier ones leaving a uniquely preserved settlement. The exhibition will have some objects not seen in public before.



Professor Fulford talking to TADS members during a visit to the Reading University excavations of Insula IX in 2007.

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

Milestones Museum The website to buy admission tickets can be found at: <https://www.milestonesmuseum.org.uk/>

10 - 18 Feb - Play Days: **Games at the Museum** returns!

The Willis Museum and Sainsbury Gallery

Please see page 5.

25 Feb at 2pm - Sunday tea and talks: £6 and must be booked.

Silchester: recent discoveries and the results of recent research, by Prof. Mike Fulford.

To book go on-line at www.hampshireculture.org.uk/willis-museum, call in or phone 01256 465902.

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

15 Feb, 7.30 pm: Bramshill House, ghosts included, by Diana White.

This 17th century house in North Hampshire is believed to have 14 ghosts!

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

Monday 12th Feb. **Cerne Abbas – Playing with Giant Ideas** by Dr Mike Allen.

(N.B. Unfortunately BAHS have had to change their lecture evening night and it is now clashes with TADS meetings. At least we get the railway buffs this month).

***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***