



March 2025

TADS Newsletter

Website - www.tadshistory.com

**Next Meeting - Monday 10th March 2025 at 8 pm, at
Baughurst and Heath End Village Hall, Heath End Road,
Baughurst RG26 5LU.**

‘It’s not all beer and skittles’ by Sue Ellis

The British love their pubs and history suggests our enjoyment of beer and brewing is longstanding. This talk is a gentle and hopefully amusing ramble through the history of brewing, breweries and pubs from Romans to the present day, with some examples of local pubs and breweries. As well as a look at their ephemera (sadly no samples!). Sue Ellis is a local historian in the Thatcham and Newbury area who has taken the idea of hands-on research seriously and has felt constrained to visit many of the pubs she mentions!

(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 14th April 2025 in Baughurst & Heath End Village Hall:

Donnington Castle, Newbury

By David Peacock

TADS Last Meeting 10th February 2025

Spitfire Production in Tadley.

by Richard Brown.

Richard explained how the Spitfire came into being as one of the first British monoplane fighters. Until the Hawker Hurricane they had all been biplanes and the last of them, the 1930s Gloster Gladiator was also the first with an enclosed cockpit – although pilots surprisingly preferred open cockpits.

The Spitfire was partially based on the 1931 Schneider Trophy Supermarine seaplanes which had achieved a World Record speed of just over 400 mph. It was designed by Reginald Mitchell, had the new Rolls Royce Merlin engine and eight machine guns. It needed to match the performance of the German Messerschmitt Bf 109 which was thoroughly tested in the Spanish Civil War of the late 1930s. The prototype of the Spitfire first flew in 1936 and was an instant hit promising a better performance than the robust Hawker Hurricane. Pretty amazing for a company best known for its lumbering biplane flying boats. Sadly Reginald Mitchell died at the young age of 42 years and never saw his beautiful aircraft go into service with the RAF in 1938.

The Spitfire was built in two factories in Southampton and a new giant factory that was being built near Birmingham. Production was initially very slow as its design was complex and was not an easy aircraft to make. It was also the first British all metal aircraft. The RAF had about 900 available by the start of the Battle of Britain in the summer of 1940, but once the Germans switched from attacking RAF airfields they quickly destroyed both Southampton factories. What to do?

Supermarine management had already realised that their factories were vulnerable to attack and were able to rapidly move Spitfire component production into requisitioned sheds and garages dotted around the South of England. (Even a few laundries and a steam roller factory). There were 30 sites in Southampton alone. The secret centres of production were based at Southampton, Newbury and Reading, Salisbury, and Trowbridge, Wiltshire. Each group had their own assembly hangar and airfield. Our local production was centered on Vincents motorcar garage in Reading producing fuselages, and the aircraft were assembled and test flown at Henley-on-Thames. Some Spitfire parts were stored in the ex-Venture Bus Garage in Baughurst. (Today called Lattice House).

In 1940 there was no airfield at Aldermaston. The airfield was built in 1942 and had 4 hangars. In 1943 Hangar 5 was built for Spitfire assembly and it was remote from the main airfield, being to the south of the A340 and in Tadley Parish. Assembly moved there from Henley-on-Thames. We only know othe names of 3 people who worked there, although there must have been at least 10 times that number of men and women. Bob Forrester was the resident Rolls Royce service engineer who tested the engines, and local lads, Arthur Long (16 years old in 1944) and Ronald Wood (14 yrs) were part of the workforce.



The interior of Hangar 5, Tadley taken in May 1944. We have counted 25 men and women just about visible in this photograph.

Production in Hangar 5 ran from February 1944 to March 1946 and a total of just over 500 aircraft of 5 Marks and 11 variants were produced. The majority of them were designed for Photo-Reconnaissance, taking photographs while flying over enemy territory. By the end of the War some Spitfires could fly at over 400 m.p.h., or 600 m.p.h. when diving.

Hangar 5 became part of the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment (AWRE) estate, although outside 'The Wire', and after 4 years of debate about its future it was demolished in 1970. Hangar Road in Tadley was named after it.

Only 9 Tadley Spitfires remain: 2 in California; 1 in each of New Zealand; Illinois, U.S.A.; the Netherlands; Norway, another possibly in the USA, and one in Britain. Several of them are in flying condition.

If you have a spare £3 1/4 million, PL965 a Tadley built PR XI based at North Weald airfield in Essex is for sale! (*Picture below*). It is very original and even has a book written about it, 'Spitfire in Blue'.

It's thanks to Richard, for his comprehensive Spitfire lecture.

Rosemary Bond.



Spitfire Mark XI no. PL965 built in Tadley.

TADS Archives

As an interim step to house the TADS archives we have taken a monthly let at the Barn Store for £119/month. We are now trying to get access to the existing cupboard in the Community Centre to shift the boxes, which is easier said than done. If anyone has any suggestions of alternative, cheaper storage we can investigate please contact Carol or myself. Contact details are at the foot of page one.

Visit to Ufton Court

18 members and friends went on the guided tour of Ufton Court and its grounds on the 21st February. It is a very interesting building mainly dating from the 1570s. It is used as an educational establishment to teach young people about history, so it is not furnished in any old style but many of the rooms do have an authentic Elizabethan appearance. Built for a Roman Catholic household it has several priest holes, none of which were believed to have been compromised when it mattered. Our thanks go to Sam and Grace for showing us around and answering our many questions.

RB



The back of Ufton court



A view of part of the front of Ufton Court



A deep 'Priest Hole' at Ufton. The ladder, to the left, is original and much prized as it is very rare.

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/>

No special events are scheduled.

The Willis Museum and Sainsbury Gallery

March: 26 – June 29: The Comedy **Wildlife Photography** Awards 2024 exhibition

30 March 2 – 3.15 pm, Sunday afternoon talk – **The Life of the British Soldier** 1814-1914 by Ian Williams.

(Followed by tea or coffee and cake) £7.00 and must be booked. To book go on-line at www.hampshireculture.org.uk/willis-museum, or call in, or phone 01256 465902.

Friends of the Willis Museum (*7.30pm at the museum, non-members £3.00 and please book by telephone on 01256 465902*)

20th March - The History and Development of **Southampton City Art Gallery** and its Permanent Collection by Tim Craven.

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

7th April. “Don’t Delay, Enrol Today” – **The Women’s Land Army** in Hampshire by John Lander

Kingsclere Local History Association have asked us to help publicise their special talk about the Royal British Legion on 4th April. The poster is on the next page which has full details.

***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***

A Special Presentation

The Royal British Legion Yesterday and Today



by Lieutenant General James Bashall, CB, CBE
to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the end of WW2

Friday 4th April 2025

at **7.30pm** (Doors and Bar open 6.30pm)

at the Fieldgate Centre, Kingsclere

Tickets **£5** in advance only
from Swan Street Stores, Kingsclere
or online from www.ticketsource.co.uk

*** Grand Raffle ***

Proceeds to the Royal British Legion
Registered Charity No 219279

Organised by Kingsclere Local History Association
and Kingsclere Royal British Legion

