



The History of Reading Society

the object of the Society is to cultivate interest in and to encourage research into the history of the town of Reading.

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NEWSLETTER - JANUARY 1987

Dear Members,

Your Committee joins with me in hoping that you enjoyed a peaceful and happy Christmas and in wishing you a happy and prosperous New Year.

The History of Reading Society, together with the Berks Archaeological Society, welcomed the arrival of 1987 in grand style on January 8th. Despite a cold and foggy night and the counter attraction of a meeting of the National Trust the Abbey Gateway Room was filled to capacity. The theme of this year's party was "The Monks and Nuns of Reading Abbey." It was encouraging to see so many people in appropriate costume - monks, nuns, pilgrims, townsfolk of the period and a Bishop (or was it the Abbot himself?). The refreshments were prepared from authentic Medieval recipes and the resulting feast was something to be remembered for many a day.

The next regular meeting of the Society will take place on Thursday, 19th February, when Eric Stanford will tell us something of the art treasures safely stored away in Reading Museum's Art Gallery. This is a meeting not to be missed.

The Annual General Meeting of the Society will this year

be held on Thursday, 19th March. The constitution requires that Officers of the Society shall stand down after they have held office for five years. Our Secretary, Sue Read, and I must therefore step aside for others to take our places. To any Members who would care to offer themselves for election as an Officer of the Society or as a Member of the Committee I would say, don't hesitate. There is much pleasure and interest to be gained from helping run this Society.

Your help, too, would be appreciated later that evening. This is Members' Evening, your evening. If you would care to spend a few minutes telling us of something which you have found interesting or in relating how things used to be, you will be most welcome. You are not expected to give a formal lecture; you will be talking with friends. You may not have anything to say but may perhaps care to bring along pictures or other items of interest for display. Your contributions, however modest, will make the evening a success.

Our season of indoor meetings continues until May 21st. Then follows two walkabout meetings when we will take a close up look at some specific area of the town guided by someone with a special knowledge of the area. Later in the Summer follows the annual excursion which this year, all being well, will be to Chichester and to the Roman Palace at Fishbourne.

Mary Southerton

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PROGRAMME FOR 1987

19th February	ART TREASURES OF READING TOWN - THE MUSEUM'S ART COLECTION Eric Stanford
19th March	AGM AND MEMBERS EVENING
23rd April	MARY RUSSELL MITFORD AND HER BERKSHIRE WORLD Dr Pamela Horn
21st May	A HISTORY OF READING UNIVERSITY Michael Bott

Particulars of the Summer walkabout meetings and of the Annual Excursion to be announced shortly.

Whilst your Committee does its best to provide a programme containing something of interest to everyone it cannot do this without your help. Your suggestions for speakers or topics for the coming season are urgently required.

CAN ANYONE ASSIST?

Miss B. Fletcher of 72, Forest Way, Highcliffe, Christchurch, Dorset is seeking information concerning her great-grandfather, Henry Hutt, who was an auctioneer in Reading from about 1860 and who went to live in Brighton in about 1909. He lived in Oxford Lodge, Oxford Road and was for many years a preacher in local villages on behalf of the Kings Road Baptist Church. Could anyone help Miss Fletcher find out more about Henry Hutt?

Henry Hutt was assisted in his evangelical work by one Henry Fuller of Ashampstead of whom also Miss Fletcher would like to know more. She goes on to say that in the 1850's the Rev Samuel Wells Kilpin was Minister of Trinity Chapel in Queens Road and that his widow, Mrs Elizabeth Kilpin, ran a school with her sister, a Miss Fuller, at Portland Place and later in Rusell Street. The name Kilpin has associations with the Bunyan Meeting church in Bedford.

If any member can assist Miss Fletcher with information concerning Henry Hutt and his family, Henry Fuller or the Kilpins she would be very glad to hear from you.

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TOWARDS A NATIONAL LEGAL MUSEUM

In a recent letter to the "Justice of the Peace" weekly, Reading solicitor, Mr G.H.Goldsmith, says that he has for some time had the idea of attempting to establish a National Legal Museum.

Apart from a small exhibition at the Royal Courts of Justice there is no permanent display or archive relating to our legal history, customs, courts and personalities, both famous and infamous. At a time when many bodies have come to recognise the need to preserve their history and to present it to the public, both to entertain and to educate, he feels it an appropriate time for the legal profession and any other interested persons to consider whether such a museum is a viable proposition. Various museum curators and advisers have been encouraging in their reponse and Lord Denning has also given his support.

Mr Goldsmith of Messrs Kidd, Rapinet, solicitors, of 175 Friar Street, Reading, looks forward to hearing from anyone who like himself feels this to be a worthwhile project.

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READING'S WATER

For hundreds of years the people of this town drew most of their drinking water from the River Kennet and from the Holybrook. It is recorded that in 1575 special dipping places were provided along the Hallowed Brook and that Commissioners were appointed to ensure the cleanliness of the water.

There was in fact no piped water in the Borough until 1641 when John Newbyre and John Millsoppe applied to the Corporation for

permission to supply houses with water. Whatever plans they may have had were not however put into effect for 1696 the Corporation granted to Ambrose Crawley and others the lease of a piece of land in Broad Street upon which to build a cistern together with that of another in Mill Lane upon which to erect machinery with which to draw water from the Kennet.

The proprietors of the budding water supply company having negotiated a rental of £8 per annum for 1000 years installed water powered pumps in Mill Lane to lift water to the cistern in Broad Street. From here it was conveyed to nearby houses via wooden mains made from bored out elm logs. Connection between house and water main was by way of lead pipes fixed to a tapered ferrule driven into the wooden pipe. The area of supply was limited and the service erratic. It is said that small fish would emerge sometimes from the taps. The waterworks was however to remain in operation for the next 124 years.

In 1820, the service was improved by the construction of a water tower in Mill Lane which fed a reservoir at Spring Gardens, Whitley. The old wooden mains were at the same time replaced by iron pipes. The water which had in the past been described as brown in colour and possessed of a distinctive taste was still unfiltered but the supply was at least more regular. In 1826, the Water Company consolidated its position by way of an Act of Incorporation. More iron pipes were laid and other improvements including the enlargement of the Whitley reservoir undertaken. The supply was however still affected by drought and frost. A further failing was that when repairs had to be carried out the whole of the system was shut down, sometimes for days on end.

The Company suffered a severe setback when in 1830 a large tank with a capacity of 7000 barrels (200,000 gallons) newly erected near the West Lodge in Coley Avenue burst no sooner than it had been filled. This structure which had taken two years to build was destroyed in under two hours. The resultant flood caused considerable damage to surrounding property and claims for compensation approaching £2000 were lodged. The Company was however able to survive this disaster and in 1836 installed steam powered pumping engines at Mill Lane. Water was still only available to a few privileged households and many people still fetched their water from the Kennet.

By 1846 the Corporation began to take an interest in the water undertaking and made an approach to Parliament for an Act to enable it to buy the Company. Some years were however to pass before this was achieved.

Spurred on by the news that a rival concern proposed to establish a water works on the Kennet about a mile upstream from Mill Lane, the Reading Water Company purchased Southcote Mill, formerly a wire works, and gave notice of its intention to provide a constant supply of filtered water. Over the course of the next two years a pumping station was built which supplied a new reservoir with filter beds at a site in the Bath Road. Here the river water was allowed to settle before being drawn off through layers of stone, gravel and sand, solid impurities being

strained out in the process. This is in fact the filtering process in use today. Bacteriological impurities were not however removed in filtering.

The Water Company was finally acquired by the Corporation in 1868. Further improvements were effected including the enlargement of the Bath Road reservoir. In 1877, the Mill Lane works ceased to operate, the water in that part of the Kennet now now being heavily polluted by the industrial premises which had developed in the area. Henceforth the Spring Gardens reservoir was supplied from Southcote via the Bath Road filters.

In the face of a growing demand for mains water, a new pumping station complete with filter beds was built in 1878 by the Kennet at Fobney. In 1890, the Fobney works was further enlarged and the Southcote works taken out of service. It was however soon apparent that the pumping facilities were insufficient and in 1899 the Southcote works, now provided with filters, resumed supplies to Bath Road.

To meet the demand for water in the higher parts of the town a new reservoir with a capacity of five and a half million gallons was built in Park Lane, Tilehurst fed from the Bath Road pumping station through a large iron main. This development enabled water to be supplied to both Tilehurst and Caversham and, in 1908, to the Shinfield area.

1910 saw the introduction of the use of chlorine to purify the water supply. Reading was in fact the first municipal authority to employ this method of sterilising water on a continuous and permanent basis.

The town continued to grow in size and the water supply was extended accordingly. By 1930 the Corporation had doubled the area of supply since acquiring the utility. Faced with ever-increasing demands for water the Corporation in 1932 acquired the Tilehurst and District Water Company and with it deep wells and pumping stations at Gipsy Lane, Tilehurst and at Pangbourne and a water tower in Norcot Lane. To facilitate the distribution of the more plentiful supply of water new reservoirs and a concrete water tower, a still familiar landmark were built at Park Lane.

The reservoir in the Bath Road, formerly of brick with a corrugated iron roof, was rebuilt in reinforced concrete in 1939.

To meet the further demands for water on account of the influx of population in the Reading area in the early years of the war a new borehole was sunk at Pangbourne and new pumps installed. The demand for water continuing to increase in post-war years further developments at Pangbourne enabled the supply from that source to be increased to 8 million gallons per day.

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IN LIGHTER VEIN

The Corporation of Reading in 1443 passed a quaint bye-law calculated to guard against the danger of fire in two ways. It seems that the barbers of the town were in the habit of shaving customers at late hours by candle light, and it was decreed that "no barber shall keep his shop open or shave any man after ten o'clock between Easter and Michaelmas, nor after nine from Michaelmas to Easter, except that he be a stranger or town worthy on pain of being fined three hundred tiles to the Guildhall, to be received by the cofferers." Instances of payment are entered in the town records.

(Contributed by Amayas Crump)

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WHO LIVED HERE, AND WHEN?

We are all familiar with those small blue and white ceramic plaques to be found on many buildings in London indicating that someone famous had been born, lived or died there. What a pity that this means of drawing attention to local history is not widely adopted elsewhere.

Locally, a small bronze plaque indicates the house in Russell Street where William Fox Talbot had his photographic studio whilst an inscription by the doorway of 15, Friar Street marks the birthplace of Professor Goldwin Smith (1823 - 1910). Except for a plaque at 13, Zinzan Street informing the passer-by that William Hogarth, painter and engraver never lived here, this is the sum total of Reading's commemoration of her more successful citizens.

Upon which local houses, and for what reason, could blue plaques be profitably mounted? A small prize will be awarded for the best list of five. Entries, please, to Sue Read or Mary Southerton by 1st March. Winning entries will be announced at the Members' Evening, 19th March.

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COMING EVENTS.....

To keep you up to date with news of courses, day schools and other events organised by the University, W.E.A. and other Societies a separate leaflet is enclosed.

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THE NEXT ISSUE of this Newsletter will appear in early May. The deadline for contributions, letters etc., by April 12th.

Peter Southerton, Editor .