



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 - AUTUMN 1988 +++++

Isn't it terrible! Only yesterday it seems we were holding our last meeting of the season and looking forward to the two Summer walkabouts and the annual excursion - and here I am telling you about the Winter Session!

Before I tell you about the delights to come let's look back at those last activities. Our first walkabout in mid-June was an exploration with Ken Major of the streets surrounding the University. What a wealth of architectural style there is to be found in the Redlands area where buildings dating from the early 19th century stand side by side with more recent creations. With Ken Major, architect and local historian, to focus our attention a pleasant stroll was doubly rewarding. Our visit to Harwell in the company of Mrs Joan Dils was sadly marred by poor weather. Between showers however we were able to observe buildings some of which have stood from medieval times. Although many of the houses have been enlarged and improved by successive owners such features as 'cruck' construction where the trunks of oaks have been split to form the framework of the building and the more familiar timber 'box frames' are readily to be seen. Buildings which were once farmhouses still line the main street and the shape of the village in ages past can readily be made out.

Although there were rather more empty seats on the coach than usual, the weather was kind to us on the occasion of our annual excursion which was this year to Cheltenham. During the course of the day we visited the Bicentennial Exhibition in the Pump Room - the town is this year celebrating the two hundredth anniversary of its acceptance as a fashionable spa - and tasted the medicinal waters. After a coach tour of the area which took in some of the terraces of

town houses built by the Honourable East India Company for its officers, the parks, the racecourse and GCHQ with its array of satellite aerials for monitoring radio communications the world over we had an opportunity to explore the town on our own and to listen to a silver band in the Jubilee Gardens.

The programme of meetings for the Winter Session covers a wide range of subjects. As usual your Secretary, Mrs Elspet Naish, has worked hard to provide a variety of speakers and topics. Your suggestions for future meetings and activities are however welcome. I would in fact go so far as to say essential if we to attract new members.

We look forward to meeting you all at the Abbey Gateway at 7.30 pm on Thursday, 15th September for the opening meeting. Don't come alone, bring a friend!

WINTER PROGRAMME 1988/9

With the exception of the New Year's Party, the date and venue of which will be notified later, all meetings will take place on the third Thursday of the month at 7.30 pm at the Abbey Gateway Room.

15th September	From the women's point of view Mrs P. Fellgett
20th October	Reading's Medieval Guildhall Dr C. Slade
17th November	Lady Reading - founder of the WRVS Mrs J. Morrish
15th December	The Trades Union Movement in Reading. Mr Keith Jerrome

January - New Year's Party with the Berks Archaeological Society. The theme is 'Rural Berkshire'. Come dressed for the part - as the Squire or his Lady, Milkmaid or Shepherdess, Ploughman or Carter or as you will.

^{16th} 18th February	The Sign of the Hop Leaf - Simonds' Brewery. Mr D. J. Simonds.
^{16th} 17th March	Annual General Meeting followed by Members' Evening
20th April	The Royal Berkshire Regiment at the Battle of Kohima. Col. F. H. B. Boshall CBE DSO
18th May	The Railways of Berkshire Mr M. Turner

THE CHAIRMAN'S QUIZ

1. Who gave his name to the Harris Arcade?
2. The Queen's Hall, built to seat 3000, with galleries, stage, assembly rooms and promenade, was used for concerts, public meetings, banquets and as a saleroom as well as serving as a Jewish synagogue. Where was it?
3. Where was Shoemakers' Row?

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THE HISTORIC HOUSES ASSOCIATION

Many of you belong to the National Trust which gives access to an enormous number of Stately Homes. Membership of English Heritage gives access to another wide range of properties. However, I am sure that like me you have often been disappointed that there is still an enormous number of stately homes for which it is still necessary to pay an admission charge.

It was only last Summer that I discovered the Historic Houses Association which is a voluntary association of a number of privately owned houses formed in 1973 to provide a voice for the many owners who were suffering the ravages of taxation.

It is possible to become a Friend of the Association (unless of course you already own a stately home and are a full member) which gives free admission to about 270 houses and gardens as well as a quarterly magazine. In 1987 the subscriptions were £14 single and £23 double. When you realise that the admission to most houses is £2 and very often £3 it does represent very good value. Most of the well-known houses, including Beaulieu, Broadlands, Blenheim, Broughton Castle, Littlecote, Stratfield Saye, Woburn and Warwick Castle are on the 1988 list. However it is only fair to point out that Mapledurham House is not included.

The Association does not seem to advertise itself; most of the houses I have visited have had no leaflets and it was only by chance that I came across it.

Particulars of Membership of the Friends may be obtained by writing to the **HHA Friends Membership Department, P.O. Box 21, Spirella House, Bridge Road, Letchworth, Herts., SG6 4ET. Tel: (0462) 679356.**

Nigel Denton.

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READING BEYOND THE LINES

Everywhere I go I seem to meet people who have some connection with Reading but few, alas, are very complimentary about it. Even Alan Wykes in "Reading: A Biography" (as he styles it) of the town comes to the conclusion that the most important building there is the railway station. Last September was particularly significant as at Traquair House (Innerleithen) I happened upon our Chairman and his wife.

However, as I travel around one does come across reference to Reading such as in the reconstruction of Margaret Thatcher's father's grocers shop at Grantham where there is prominent a pile of Huntley & Palmer's biscuit tins. Among the old fashioned station hoardings at Pickering on the North Yorkshire Moors Railway there is one for Huntley & Palmer's biscuits. Even further afield the reconstruction of George Baxter's shop in the factory that markets "fine foods from Scotland" at Fochabers (in Moray) also contains Huntley & Palmer's tins.

Perhaps, the real recognition came last year on British Rail's Network Days when among the twenty or so attractions listed as worthy of a visit were Salisbury Cathedral, Ely Cathedral, The Mary Rose, Oxford and Blake's Lock Museum!

Nigel Denton.

ANSWERS TO THE CHAIRMAN'S QUIZ:

1. John Harris (Reading) Ltd., motor engineers occupied salerooms and workshops in Station Road. In 1923 the business was sold to City Motors of Oxford who continued trading as Great Western Motors. The name originally given to the arcade was retained.
2. On the north side of Valpy Street. It was built in 1894 for Robert Tompkins of the Royal Horse and Carriage Repository, Friar Street, From 1901 it was occupied by Petty & Sons' Press and demolished in 1950. The former offices of the Berkshire Chronicle at No.17 had been the entrance to the gallery. The initials 'RT' can still be seen on the front of the building.
3. East side of the Market Place (1552).

DAY SCHOOLS AND EVENING COURSES

The University of Reading in association with the W.E.A. is this year, as always, offering a comprehensive range of Evening Courses and Day Schools. These are open to people of all ages and backgrounds. No special qualifications are demanded. These not only provide education but can be a good way of meeting people with interests similar to your own.

The following are but a few of the courses on offer:

EVENING COURSES.

HOW TO BEGIN IN LOCAL HISTORY. Wednesdays from 12th October. 20 meetings in all. Tutor Prof. A. Rogers MA PhD. Fee £32.00

MEDIEVAL VILLAGES AND TOWNS OF BERKSHIRE. Tuesdays from 4th October. 10 meetings. Tutor Mr I. S. Beckwith BA. Fee £17.00

UNDERSTANDING DOCUMENTS FOR LOCAL AND FAMILY HISTORY, 1500-1700. 10 meetings. Tutor Mrs J. Dils BA. Fee £17.00

DAYTIME COURSE

EXPLORING VICTORIAN CAVERSHAM. Fridays 9.45 - 11.45 am from 9th June, 1989. This course which will be led by Mrs Joan Dils and Mr H. Godwin Arnold will study the expansion of the village of Caversham and the hamlets of Emmer Green and Kidmore End. The course includes a walkabout. 5 meetings. Fee £9.00.

SATURDAY SCHOOLS.

RURAL HISTORY SOURCES. 4th March, 1989 at the Museum of English Rural Life. 9.30 am - 5.30 pm. A closer look at the rural history sources held by the Museum, what they tell us about the past and how to use them. Tutor Dr Sadie Ward. Fee £5.70

INTRODUCTION TO ARCHIVES. Come behind the scenes at the Berkshire Record Office. What are archives? How are they kept? How do I use them? 26th November, 1988. 9.30am - 5.00 pm Tutor Dr P. Durrant. Fee £5.70.

A prospectus with further details of these courses and many, many more is available free of charge from the Public Library or direct from the Extramural Office, Room G15, School of Education, The University, London Road, Reading.

THE LOVEDAYS OF CAVERSHAM

The riverside gardens of Caversham Court still bear clues to the time when they formed a worthy setting to the ancient house, demolished in 1933. Boundary walls, a stable block and a gazebo alone survive. For most of its existence the house was known as the Old Rectory although it had long ceased to belong to Notley Abbey being sold into lay ownership at the time of the Reformation, 1538. The Loveday family leased the property from Christ Church, Oxford in the middle of the 17th century and remained in occupation for over a hundred years. Thomas (1618-1681), a citizen and goldsmith of London with property at White Waltham came here with his young wife Letitia, some 30 years his junior, who died at the early age of 23 leaving a four year old daughter. Thomas did not long remain a widower and his second wife, Mary, produced a son and heir of whom little is recorded except that he shortened his life by hard drinking.

It is of his son, John, born at the Rectory in 1711, that we know most. After attending Reading School under the headship of the Rev. Haviland John Hiley M.A., he entered Magdalen College as a Gentleman Commoner and at once devoted himself to those philosophic and archaeological pursuits which were to occupy him for the rest of his life. At Oxford he attracted the favourable attention of the antiquarian, Thomas Hearne, in whose 'Collections' there are many references to John's researches and discoveries of rare parchments, books and inscriptions, some of which were to form part of the library he was accumulating at Caversham. Hearn mentions that "this very curious (i.e. inquiring) young gentleman" made ineffectual attempts to obtain information concerning the Corporation Charities of Reading. His belief that the obdurate silence of the Corporation was from 'frowardness and guilt' leaves us suspecting that the Charities were indeed being misapplied.

John travelled widely in this country, often accompanied by his Magdalen tutor, Peter Zinzan, of the Reading family and kept a full and elaborate diary describing the ancient buildings he visited. He was to become widely cultivated by learned authors and acquired "an extraordinary fund of knowledge of history and antiquities, of Hebrew and Greek and all kinds of philological learning." He was thrice married and died in 1781.

His son, another John, (1742-1809) who was also educated at Reading School and Magdalen, inherited both the property and his father's studious habit of mind. He qualified as a lawyer but his legal career ceased when in 1777 he married a lady of wealth and eventually moved, with his father's library and collections, to her home in Banbury. So ended the association of the Lovedays with Caversham.

~~J.G.~~

~~The Chairman's Quiz appears overleaf.~~