



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.

Hon Secretary

Mr Nigel Denton
12, Maria Court
Southcote Road
READING

Tel: 585576

Chairman

J.G.Gafford Esq.JP
15, St.Andrews Road
READING RG4 7PH

Tel: 474308

Hon. Treasurer

Lt.Cdr G.Naish
19, Denmark Road
READING RG1 5PA

Tel: 87216

-----NEWSLETTER SPRING 1989-----

Twenty six members were present at the 10th Annual General Meeting of your Society on March 16th to hear the Chairman's report of the events of the past year. As usual your Committee has endeavoured to embrace as wide a field as possible in the choice of subject matter for the monthly meetings. This year the time scale ranged from Dr Cecil Slade's account of life in the medieval borough to Mr Keith Jerrome's talk on the growth of the Trades Union movement in Reading. Outdoor events included an exploration of Harwell village (in torrential rain), a walkabout to view the architecture of the Redlands area and an enjoyable coach trip to Cheltenham.

Your Treasurer having circulated the audited accounts reported a small but disappointing deficit for the year. Membership has decreased by nine. More members are needed if we are to maintain sufficient funds to meet running costs, particularly the rental of our meeting place. Members are asked to spread the word and introduce as many prospective new members as possible.

Mr James Gafford was re-elected Chairman by a unanimous vote. Elspet Naish having come within the scope of the 'five year rule' relinquishes her post in favour of Nigel Denton. Graeme Naish continues his stirring work as Hon. Treasurer. Miss Anne Brown through pressure of work leaves the Committee which for the coming year will comprise Mr Bob Hutchinson, David Quartermaine and Peter and Mary Southerton. Mr Bent Weber has kindly consented to serve as Hon. Auditor for another year.

The formal business of the evening was followed by a most interesting and enjoyable illustrated account of 'Reading Then and Now' by Mr Ron Walker.

VICTORIAN INDUSTRY AND READING

The Society was well represented at the public lecture given at Reading University on Tuesday, 21st March to commemorate the life of Mr Fred Padley, a founding father of this Society, who died in February, 1988. In his opening remarks the speaker, Dr Tony Corley, described Fred as a truly remarkable man who will long be remembered for his work with the University. A non-academic with his feet firmly on the ground he was the last of that band of legendary characters who helped build University College into the University of Reading. He will long be remembered, too, for his enthusiasm for the history of Reading, for his work with the WEA and for his contribution to this Society, to BIAG and to many other local bodies.

In his lecture, Dr Corley outlined the development of Reading in the Victorian era. Despite its lack of the traditional staple commodities of industry - coal, iron and other mineral deposits and the raw materials for the large scale manufacture of textiles - it grew nevertheless from a market town to a major industrial centre. This was due in the main to the favourable situation of the town with its agricultural hinterland and ready access to the main trade routes, the roads, waterways and later the railways, which made Reading well suited to the processing and distribution of agricultural produce and attracted many able entrepreneurs. Grain brought for malting and then sent by river to London was during the 18th Century an important source of income. As communications improved it became possible for other goods produced in large quantities locally to be sent not only to London but to other parts of the country and abroad. Thus by the 1860's Reading was internationally renowned not only for its Beer, Bulbs, Biscuits and Boxes but also for such diverse products as machinery from the Katesgrove iron works and sauce by Messrs Cocks.

Proposing a vote of thanks to the speaker, Mr James Gafford said that the subject of the lecture was an appropriate way of remembering an old friend whose life had spanned the years from the reign of Queen Victoria to that of Elizabeth. The venue, too, was of significance, Fred Padley having spent almost the whole of his working life in the London Road campus and at Whiteknights.

-----ooo000ooo-----

THE CHAIRMAN'S QUIZ

J.G.

- (a) Why King Street?
- (b) Who was Silas Tompkin Comberbatch?
- (c) Where was Little End?

Answers on page 4

FOR YOUR BOOKSHELF

**The Royal Berkshire Hospital 1839-1989
by Margaret Railton and Marshall Barr**

Commemorating the 150th anniversary of the founding of the Royal Berks Hospital this book is a major addition to the literature relating to the history of the town of Reading.

In two sections, the first, 'The Voluntary Hospital 1839-1948' by local historian, Margaret Railton, describes the building of the hospital and its development from the days when maintained entirely by public subscription treatment was only given to the needy poor upon the recommendation of subscribers, the advance of medical science and the development of health services until the inauguration of the National Health Service. Dr Barr, himself a member of the History of Reading Society, then continues the story describing developments over the past forty years with all the problems and difficulties which have arisen in providing the facilities demanded of a modern general hospital.

Priced at £12.95, this 368-page hardback volume is now available from most local booksellers, from the Appeal Office and from the League of Friends shop at the hospital.

All profits from the sale of this volume will go to the hospital's 150th Anniversary Appeal Fund for the redevelopment of the Radiotherapy Department.

**A GUIDE TO READING ABBEY
by Brian Kemp and Cecil Slade**

Published by the Friends of Reading Abbey and priced at a modest 40p this pocket-sized booklet with its simple outline plan takes the reader on a tour of the ruins pointing out features which might otherwise pass unnoticed. of the surviving traces of this once magnificent range of buildings.

Sponsored by the TP Bennett Partnership, Architects for the MEPC Abbey Gardens Development, the profits go to the Friends of Reading Abbey to assist in the work of safeguarding this reminder of Reading's medieval past.

READING FROM THE AIR

Not a book but an hour-long video film shot from a light aircraft and presenting an aerial tour of Reading, Caversham, Pangbourne and Goring. The quality of the photography is remarkably good and allows the viewer a rare opportunity to see the town and the surrounding countryside from the air. You will probably pick out your own house. The commentary by the pilot allows one to follow the route with ease and pick out the salient features of the landscape.
Price £10.95 from Fotokine, Oxford Road or direct from Berkshire Aerographics, 754, Oxford Road, Reading.

JUNK MAIL? THEY CALL IT PRINTED EPHEMERA

Hardly a day passes without the postman bringing to our homes an assortment of brightly coloured literature encouraging us buy goods that we don't really need or to borrow money which we can't afford to repay. There also comes through our letter boxes a variety of pamphlets and leaflets, many delivered by hand, advertising local events, services and products, notices from the churches and occasionally from serving or prospective Council or party political candidates. The majority of these items go almost immediately into the waste-paper basket and are promptly forgotten.

Could we not turn this paper to good use? Because of its ad hoc nature this material could be of great help in years to come to students of local history, economics, art and design and to others attempting to visualise life in the latter years of the 20th Century. A comprehensive collection indexed and securely packed would take up minimal space in the archives of the local library, museum or records office but yet could prove a most worthwhile investment. The collection of ephemera of local interest is a service which the History of Reading Society could usefully perform.

Is there among our number a Member who would care to start such a collection on behalf of the Society? This is a project which could be undertaken by a small group of friends. The collection need only embrace items which are delivered one's home although it could be enriched by the inclusion of small posters and notices, programmes and even ticket stubs. The help of other members of the Society could be enlisted by an appeal for material being made at each monthly meeting. The work entailed would be small. All that is needed is for the collected items to be stored away in a cardboard box or large envelope in readiness for sorting and listing, say, every six months. Arrangements could be made for permanent storage without your having the responsibility for what in time could become a fairly bulky collection. If any member would care to take charge of collecting the items or would just like to assist please have a word with Peter Southerton (Tel: 576867).

Answers to The Chairman's Quiz.

- (a) In 1760 Middle Row was demolished and the narrow lanes known as Sun Lane and Back Lane became one street so named in honour of the accession of King George III.
- (b) The poet Samuel Coleridge Taylor (1782-1834) - Kubla Khan, The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, etc. He left Jesus College, Cambridge to enlist in the 15th Light Dragoons under this assumed name. He was hopeless as a horseman and while his troop was quartered at Reading (probably at The Bear in Bridge Street) Dr Mitford persuaded his Captain to discharge him and he returned to his University.
- (c) The north end of Prospect Street, Caversham, where the Prince of Wales pub stands.