



## *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 - SPRING 1990

THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING of the Society, the Agenda of which is included on a separate sheet, will this year take place on Thursday, 15th March at the Abbey Gateway Room at 7.30 pm. Following the short business meeting Elspet Naish will speak on Archbishop Laud who born born in Reading rose from humble beginnings to become one of the most powerful men in the land before himself suffering a dramatic fall.

The subject matter of our meetings over the past months has been as varied as you could wish; from Nancy Saunders' talk in November on Thomas Noon Talfourd, lawyer and man of letters, one of the worthies of Reading whose contribution has sadly been overlooked, to Keith Jerrome's account in September of those Reading men who went of their own free will to fight in the Spanish Civil War for a cause for which they were prepared to lay down their lives. In October, Mr Norman Wicks took us on "A Walk through History" with a beautifully illustrated account of the treasures of Henley on Thames. The year ended with Mr Paul Chadwick's report of the latest developments in archaeology within the county. The annual party with Reading Races as its theme was greatly enjoyed.

Particulars of future meetings are set out overleaf. In addition to the Summer walkabout meetings, one in Reading and one at one of the more picturesque villages, there will be an additional outdoor meeting - an evening walk around Henley on Thursday, 10th. May, led by Norman Wicks. Meet at Henley Station at 7 pm.

Nigel who is already working hard on the programme for 1990/91 would however still be glad of your ideas, suggestions and requests.



### RAT POACHING

*This item which is condensed from an occasional historical note by R. D. Woodall in a recent issue of 'The Justice of the Peace' has nothing whatsoever to do with the history of Reading but is included for sheer amusement.*

A professional rat-catcher by the name of Samuel Humm was brought before the Police Court in the late 1860's charged with poaching on the preserves of the newly established Commissioners of Sewers. He had been seen to open a manhole in New Street Square, through which he descended into the sewer and to emerge some time later. Stopped and searched by an observant Constable he was found to have thirty live rats in the bag which he had taken down with him. Brought before the Police Court, the Magistrate regarded the prosecution as frivolous and pointed out that the defendant was doing a public service in getting rid of rats which were known to be spreaders of disease. The Inspector of Sewers however pressed the case arguing that as the Commissioners were the owners of the sewers the rats in them were legally theirs and they wanted them caught only by their own employees. The Magistrate discharged Humm and said that he would try to get him a rat licence, if such a thing existed, so that he might continue to reduce the number of rats in London's sewers. Humm never received permission to catch rats in the sewers, the Commissioners adamantly sticking to their position that the rats were their property.

In the reports of the case, no one seems to have mentioned that live rats had a cash value of their own. In those days many public houses had rat pits in which the patrons' terriers competed against each other to see which could kill the greatest number of rats in a set time. Rat catchers did much of their work clearing warehouses and grain stores of rats. In addition to their fee they were allowed to take away their prey. The chief complaint against them was that they would always leave a few young rats to to ensure that their services might be called upon again at some future date.

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#### CAN ANYONE ASSIST?

Has any Member any recollection of Miss Jane Messenger or of Mr Tom Muddiman. Both Diocesan were Police Court Missionaries in Reading from the last years of the 19th century until the outbreak, of the first World War. In 1908 they were made honorary Probation Officers to the Reading Magistrates Court. Mr Muddiman looked after the ex-prisoners hostel in Bedford Road whilst Miss Messenger was the Matron of the Girls' Refuge in Castle Street. I suspect that in addition to these duties they were also fully engaged in other church and charitable work. Miss Messenger died in 1915. Mr Muddiman retired about that time but may have remained in Reading for some years following his retirement.

I am anxious to obtain information concerning these two people. It may be possible that they have relatives still living in the area. Can anyone advise?

Peter Southerton.

MRS. BEETON'S APPLE CHEESECAKES

Many Members have asked for the recipe for the cheesecakes served at the New Year Picnic, Here it is - straight from the First Edition of 1861, Simple, economical and absolutely delicious!

Ingredients: ½lb apple pulp, ¼ld sifted sugar, ¼lb butter, 4 eggs, the rind and juice of one lemon.

Mode: Pare, core and boil sufficient apples to make ½lb when cooked; add to the the sugar, the butter which should be melted; the eggs leaving out two of the whites, and the grated rind and juice of a lemon; stir the mixture well; line some patty tins with puff paste, put in the mixture and bake about 20 minutes.

The above quantity is sufficient to make 18-20 tarts.

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FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

15th March 1990 Annual General Meeting.

The brief business meeting will be followed by a talk by Mrs Elspet Naish on the life and times of Archbishop Laud.

26th April Reading's Own Police Force. Mr L. C. Dolby

Established in 1836, the Reading Borough Police preserved the Queen's Peace in Reading until incorporation into the Thames Valley Police in 1968.

10th May Outdoor meeting.

We explore Henley on Thames with Mr Norman Wicks. Meet Henley Railway Station, 7 p.m.

17th May Presidential Address - Aspects of Reading's History

By Dr C.E. Slade, founder and President of the Society. Archaeologist and eminent Local Historian.

The Summer walkabout meetings will take place on June 14th and July 12th. Particulars to be circulated shortly.

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DAY SCHOOL - ARCHAEOLOGY IN BERKSHIRE 1989

This annual Day School organised jointly by the University of Reading and the Berkshire Archaeological Society will take place this year on Saturday 17th March at Reading University, London Road from 9:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. The cost is £3.50 (O.A.P.'s and unemployed £1.75). Bring your own lunch - tea and coffee provided at a nominal charge.