



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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SPRING 1990

At the Annual General Meeting we said farewell to James Gafford who had served as Chairman for the last three years. The Society is in his debt for all the work he has put in over the years. As Dr. Slade once said many other local societies would not know where they were without James as their Treasurer.

We welcome in his place David Quartermaine who needs no further introduction as a founder member of the Society and a former Treasurer and Chairman.

Graeme Naish retired after five years as Treasurer and again the Society is grateful for all the work he has done.

Bob Hutchinson who joined the Committee last year became Treasurer.

Nigel Denton was re-elected as Secretary having taken over the role the previous year.

The Constitution was changed at the Annual General Meeting to remove the restriction on more than five years continuous Committee membership. This meant that Graeme Naish became eligible for election. Peter and Mary Southerton were re-elected and we were pleased to welcome Elspet Naish back after a break of a year.

In presenting his report the retiring Treasurer referred to the declining membership. During the year the Society had just broken even but it was essential to recruit more members.

The Secretary outlined the programme for the next season which was more or less complete. He said that in order to widen the range of speakers and topics the Committee had decided to devote the following season (1991-1992) to some of the villages around Reading. Already four or five speakers were lined up.

The formal business was followed by a talk on one of Reading's most famous sons, Archbishop William Laud (1573-1645) by Elspet Naish.

ARCHAEOLOGY IN BERKSHIRE 1989

An annual event in the programme of the Berkshire Archaeology Society is the day school held at Reading University each March at which the work of the previous year is reviewed in what the programme describes as a friendly and informal atmosphere.

As usual the programme consisted of a number of speakers from the ranks of the professionals as well as from local societies.

Archaeologists Steve Ford and Sue Lobb spoke of their work around Hungerford and Thatcham as well as in Reading where the completion of the Inner Distribution Road had led to further excavation of the abbey precincts. A large mediaeval cemetery has been uncovered. From the absence of grave goods it was concluded that it was probably the lay cemetery as traditionally they were sited to the north of Benedictine abbeys.

Over the next few years the development of the Oracle site will give plenty of scope for excavations (an integral part of the planning consent) over a very wide area that contains the site of the mediaeval guildhall, two saxon mills and ancient watercourses. The latest radar techniques are being used to assist in this.

Godwin Arnold spoke of his work in recording chapels and meeting houses. With the large number of historic Anglican parish churches in the country it is often forgotten that there were almost as many chapels in the non-conformist tradition each providing its own interest.

Ted Sammes, from Maidenhead spoke of the problem of interpretation with the large number finds from the eleven mediaeval Camley pottery kilns (near to Maidenhead) which had been excavated some 25 years previously during a housing development. In all nearly 700Kg of pottery had been extracted.

Tim Allen from Oxford discussed recent excavations near to the site of Abingdon Abbey. Again a large lay cemetery has been discovered on the north side yielding 600 articulated skeletons and up to 300 "confused" ones. The base of a detached bell tower has been unearthed. A civil war cemetery had also been found. Its existence being partly attested for by the written records of the time. For many years it had been supposed that there had been a Roman settlement here but now hard evidence has been found indicating that it was a market centre.

Leslie Cram from Reading Museum spoke on storing archaeology for future generations. He took as his definition of archaeology "the evidence for man and his past environment held in the earth". He considered how techniques have developed over the past hundred years. The earliest archaeologists rather than sampling often destroyed the evidence. This was not to criticise them as they did not know about stratigraphy let alone radio-carbon dating. To find the content of a barrow mound meant removing it whereas today a sample trench might be cut. With modern techniques we can interpret finds in ways that our predecessors never dreamt of. He thought that in a 100 years from now archaeology will be very much like history is today namely re-interpreting existing evidence rather than finding more sites. We owe it to our successors to leave sites such that they are available for future generations to interpret afresh.

ARCHAEOLOGY IN BERKSHIRE 1989 (continued)

Tony Higgott, Curator of Newbury Museum, continuing the same theme, considered of the problems of storage and conservation. There was no point in storing vast quantities of recovered material which could not subsequently be identified. Having decided what to store it was then essential to arrange for the right conditions for storage which inevitably varied from object to object.

Ann Middleton, Chairman of Berkshire Industrial Archaeology Group, spoke of their recent work in recording the remains of a small brewery in Queen's Road, Reading. Most of the buildings were now bereft of their machinery but it was important to record them.

The final speaker was David Rough from the Royal Berkshire Aviation Society. He said that despite having had 8 aircraft manufacturers and 28 airfields in the county there was no museum dedicated to the history of aviation in the county. However, the society was in the process of opening one in a former hanger (donated by the Adwest Group) near to Dinton Pastures Country Park.

Thank you to Gareth Thomas for arranging such an interesting and varied programme.

Nigel Denton

CONGRATULATIONS

Congratulations are due to Leslie Cram, Keeper of Archaeology at Reading Museum, on his recent election as a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries. This distinction which is not given lightly is in recognition of his work on Reading Abbey and at Reading Museum.

MUSEUMS GUIDE

As you probably know last year was designated as Museums Year in celebration of the centenary of the foundation of the Museums Association. "The Times" newspaper published a "Museums Passport" in conjunction with a guidebook which listed concessions such as reduced price admissions to a number of participating museums as well as reductions in many museum shops.

Admissions to museums increased by 20% last year and the Passport and Guide are being reissued again this year. The Guide will be available in shops after 26 April but is available from "The Times" before that at the cheaper price of £5.95 (including postage). The Passport is only available (free) from "The Times" using application forms printed therein most days.

Nigel Denton who is a regular reader of "The Times" will be happy to send a form to any members who send him a stamped addressed envelope. However, it is probably cheaper to buy your own for 30p!

READING'S RAILWAYS

Our friends in Berkshire Industrial Archaeology Group are having a talk given by Tony Harden on "Railways around Reading 1830-1980" on Tuesday 24 April at 7.30 p.m. at the Museum of English Rural Life. Non-members are welcome at a charge of £1 (including coffee).

FORTHCOMING DATES

- 26 April 1990 Reading's Own Police Force
Mr. Len Dolby
- 10 May A Visit to Henley led by Mr. Norman Wicks
Meet Henley Station at 7 p.m.
- 17 May Aspects of Reading's History
Dr. C.F. Slade
- 14 June Over Caversham Bridge to the Warren
with Ken. Major
Meet at the north end of Caversham
Bridge at 7 p.m.
- 12 July A Visit to Wallingford led by Mrs. Joan Dils
Meet by the Town Hall in the Market
Square at 7.15 p.m.
(To park turn left and left again at the end
of the market square)

The two indoor meetings commence at 7:30 p.m. in the Abbey Gateway Room, The Forbury.

NEXT YEAR'S PROGRAMME

At the Annual General Meeting the Secretary outlined the programme for the next season which is provisionally set out below:

- 20 September 1990 The Kennet and Avon Canal
Mr. David Copley
- 18 October 1990 Two Hundred Years of the Berkshire Yeomanry
Mr. A. French and Lt. Col. Verey
- 15 November 1990 The Life of a Farmer's Wife in the 1940's
Mrs. Nancy Saunders
- 13 December 1990 One Thousand Years of Reading's Waterways
Mr. Norman Wicks
- 10 January 1991 New Year Party
- 21 February 1991 Along Bath Road and Castle Hill
Miss L. Jackson
- 21 March 1991 Annual General Meeting followed by
The Devil's Highway
Mr. James Gafford
- 18 April 1991 To be arranged
- 16 May 1991 Church Monuments since 1600
Dr. Brian Kemp

During the summer months we will have our regular programme of evening walks. Ken. Major will lead us around part of Reading and Joan Dils will show us around Abingdon (which everybody knows is really in Berkshire).

EASTER

The Committee take this opportunity to wish all members and friends a very Happy Easter.