



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 N. Denton
12, Maria Court,
Southcote Road,
Reading RG3 2AS

Tel: 585576

Chairman

Mr D. Quartermaine
The Round House
Tidmarsh,
Reading RG8 8ER

Tel: 843059

Hon. Treasurer

Mr R. Hutchinson
19, Rosehill Park,
Caversham,
Reading RG4 8XE

Tel: 479379

NEWSLETTER - AUTUMN 1990

Coming Events

- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| 20 September 1990 | The Kennet & Avon Canal
Mr David Copley |
| 18 October 1990 | Two Hundred Years of the Berkshire Yeomanry
Lt. Col Verey & Mr A. French |
| 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 | Christmas Day at the Workhouse
New Year Party |
| 21 February 1991 | Along Bath Road and Castle Hill
Miss Lorna Jackson |
| 21 March 1991 | Annual General Meeting followed by 'The Devil's Highway' an illustrated talk by Mr James Gafford. |
| 18 April 1991 | The Civil War and the Siege of Reading
Mr Eric Stanford |
| 16 May 1991 | Church Monuments since 1600
Dr Brian Kemp |

SOCIETY NEWS

NEW YEAR PARTY

For many years the Society has organised jointly with the Berkshire Archaeological Society a party to celebrate the arrival of the New Year. We hope on this occasion to be joined by the Friends of Reading Abbey.

Each year the chosen theme is reflected in the fare provided. This year (or more accurately, next year) the theme will be "Christmas Day at the Workhouse". Members may however rest assured that there will be vittles in plenty for all!

Elspet Naish who will have charge of the kitchens would appreciate some help. Would Members who are able to help by providing food or in any other way please get in touch with Elspet (Tel: 872166). She will be able to provide suitable recipes.

Tickets price £2.50 will be available from the October meeting.

DR BRIAN KEMP

We congratulate Dr Brian Kemp, Senior Lecturer in History at the University of Reading upon his election to the Personal Chair of Medieval History.

In addition to his extensive work in connection with the records of the Abbey, Dr Kemp has established himself as the acknowledged expert on Church Monuments. We look forward to his talk at the May meeting on this subject.

THE BERKSHIRE LOCAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION

Congratulations, too, to Cliff Debney upon his election as Chairman of the Berkshire Local History Association to which this Society is affiliated. Another of our members, Ann Middleton, is currently a member of the Committee of that Society.

ANNUAL PROGRAMME AND PUBLICITY LEAFLET

Enclosed with this Newsletter is a card with particulars of the programme for the coming year which we hope you will find helpful. Further copies are available from the Hon. Secretary, Nigel Denton. Included on the card is an application for membership of the Society. Please feel free to pass this on to any friend who may be interested in joining us. Copies are shortly to be placed in the libraries, the Museum and other outlets. If you can suggest any other place where these may usefully be displayed, please let any Committee member know.

As the Summer walkabout meetings are arranged later in the year particulars will be circulated later.

From "The Reading Mercury", 16th August, 1902.

"Planting a Commemoration Tree"

A well-established scarlet oak was given by Mrs George Phippen and was planted in the centre of the northern lawn near the Lion (in the Forbury).

Mr Frank Cooksey, the General Secretary of the Coronation Festivities Committee read the following resolution "That the Mayor be requested on behalf of the inhabitants of this Borough to plant a tree in commemoration of the auspicious occasion of the coronation of Their Majesties King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra,"

The Mayor in his speech said "he trusted that the tree would grow and flourish and that it would serve to remind the children of today and generations to follow them of the coronation of the King and Queen," The work of planting was then proceeded with, the Mayor, the Mayoress and Master Bull, the Town Clerk and the Members of the Corporation according to seniority, and the ladies present, in turn shovelling earth around the roots amid much merriment; afterwards followed by the boys and girls in the crowd."

The Mayor, Alfred Holland Bull, held office for three consecutive years, 1900-1, 1901-2 and 1902-3. His drapery store stood at 52-58 Broad Street, the site now redeveloped and occupied by Littlewoods and adjacent shops. His house furnishing department extended through to Friar Street.

George Phippen, FRHS, had a seedsman's business at 108, Broad Street and grew plants, bushes and trees at Victoria Nursery in Oxford Road, Bedford Road, Sherwood Street and Whitley Wood Road.

The writer can remember a cast-iron plate with raised letters which stood by this tree for many years but disappeared a long time ago, possibly during the war years. Eleven years ago he wrote to the Reading Borough Council parks department asking for a replacement notice to be put beside the tree so that the reason for its planting could be remembered. Two years later he repeated the request and was informed that an order had been placed for a painted signboard. However, nine years on it has still not materialised. While writing these notes he was reminded of this and so had written again to the Parks Department with the same request. Perhaps we shall see some action taken?

Redingensian

COUNTY RECORDS

Overleaf is a letter from Mrs Joan Dils concerning the unhappy state of the Berkshire Record Office. Ready access to these records is essential not only to researchers in local history but to everyone with an interest in how our county, our towns and villages have grown up over the years. Whilst the County Archivist and his staff are doing their best to assist anyone seeking information or wishing to see records and documents they are working under impossible conditions. Let us as Members of the History of Reading Society and as private individuals give them all the support that we can muster.

Dear Fellow Local Historian,

I am writing to ask for your help in improving the service which the Berkshire Record Office provides for researchers.

At present I represent users of the Record Office on the Archives Working Party which reports to the Community Services Committee of the Berkshire County Council on archival matters. The report of the County Archivist, Dr Peter Durrant, to the group at his last meeting highlighted several matters of great concern for the future, including the huge backlog of documents to be catalogued. Some statistics will illustrate the position:

Total storage space in the B.R.O. filled with records	16,000 feet
Total storage space with uncatalogued records including	7,000 feet
Reading Borough Records	1,400 boxed and 2,500 volumes
Windsor Borough Records	930 boxes and 1,000 volumes
Private records	2,600 feet

It will take until the year 2080 at present rates of progress to make these records available for study; effectively half Berkshire records, and therefore its history, remains closed to researchers. The situation is likely to worsen as the Record Office acquires more documents and its staffing quota remains static. Berkshire employs 5 archivists for its 750,000 population and 16,000 feet of records. Suffolk - 638,000 population - has 24 and Hampshire 12. Berkshire's County Archivist is asking for one extra member of staff, a Senior Cataloguer, to develop and monitor the huge task of bringing the records into use.

The Policy and Planning Working Party of the Community Services Committee will be putting together its budget proposals for 1991-2 during the next couple of months. It is essential to impress upon the members the importance of this proposed new post if there is to be any hope of acquiring new cataloguing staff. Please will you write in support of the County Archivist to the Chair of the Policy and Planning Working Party of the Community Service Committee as soon as possible, but certainly before the end of September. Even after that your letter could have an impact. Could you also ask fellow local historians, society members and so on, to write as well. The more the pressure, the more chance there is of success, and so of better local history provision in the County.

The person to write to is: Mrs Pearl Slatter,
Shire Hall,
Shinfield Park,
READING RG2 9XD

Many thanks for your help.

Yours sincerely,

Joan A. Dils.