



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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WINTER 1991

The more observant among you probably noticed the omission of the names of Peter and Mary Southerton from the Society's programme card published during the autumn. This was because they were on the verge of moving to live near to their daughter and her family in Cheltenham.

It was largely on the initiative of Peter that the Society was founded in 1977 and he was the Chairman until ill-health forced him to retire. However, he was not idle after that and not only was he on the Committee for most of the intervening years but he also edited the Newsletter for the last six years. Anybody who has ever done that job is fully aware of the amount of work that is involved. For the past two years he was also Minutes Secretary. As if that was not enough he organised a number of coach trips over the years.

As is well-known his particular interest was the history of crime and punishment - rather a busman's choice as he worked for the Probation Service. His book "The Story of a Prison" about H.M. Prison, Reading (alas, now out of print) was published in 1975. He was also a vice-President of the Friends of Reading Abbey.

Unfortunately, Peter was unwell again last year and decided to take early retirement. Despite all this he continued to work for the Society as well as writing a history of the local Probation Service.

Mary was our Chairman from 1984 to 1987 as well as supporting Peter over the years. For many years they provided the coffee after our meetings.

The Society is in their debt and the Committee has on your behalf sent them a book-token for £25. In recognition of their work over the years the Committee has elected them as Honorary Life Members. Additionally, the Committee has appointed Peter to the newly created post of vice-President.

SOCIETY MATTERS

The departure of Peter and Mary Southerton has inevitably left a gap in the ranks of the Committee. As noted above Peter had been both Minutes Secretary and Newsletter Editor. Volunteers are needed to perform these tasks if the Society is to continue.

For most of its time the Society has had a Minutes Secretary, distinct from the Secretary, who essentially has to record the topics discussed and decisions taken at Committee meetings for ratification at the next Committee meeting. Both the present Secretary and his predecessor, Elspet Naish, were previously Minutes Secretary.

The Newsletter is the one way that the Society is able to keep in touch with the membership. As is very often the case it falls to the Editor to write most of it as very little in the way of articles, notes and the like has ever been forthcoming from the members. Once a Newsletter has been edited and typed it has to be printed or photocopied and distributed. There is no reason why some of these jobs cannot be undertaken by different people. With the advent of modern technology in the form of word processors the actual typing can become less of a burden as a letter can be assembled as the muse directs rather than being typed as a last minute frantic effort. (However, it has to be said that even with a word processor the old traditions persist!) The Committee has decided to give members the opportunity to discuss the future of the Newsletter at the Annual General Meeting. Meanwhile, if anybody has any ideas or is able to offer any assistance please get in touch with one of the Committee.

The Society's present Constitution was adopted in 1983. However, at the 1989 Annual General Meeting it was revised to remove the restriction to a maximum of five years continuous service for Committee members. As many members may not have a copy of the Constitution a copy as revised is being sent with the Notice of the Annual General Meeting which is being distributed with this Newsletter.

The Society's financial year ends on 31 December which means that annual subscriptions for 1991 fell due on 1 January. Renewal forms are enclosed with this Newsletter for those who had not paid to the beginning of this month. However, the subscriptions of new members who have joined since last summer will be effective until 31 December 1991. If we have inadvertently included a subscription renewal form and you have already paid please pass it to a friend.

The Constitution stipulates that the executive Committee shall consist of the three Officers namely Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer and not less than four and not more than six other members. The present Officers together with the two remaining Committee members (Graeme and Elspet Naish) are willing to continue for a further year. However, that still leaves at least two vacancies. If you would like to join the Committee - or feel that you can help the Society in any way perhaps you could get in touch with one of the present Committee.

On a more positive note the Committee is pleased to welcome a number of new members who have joined as a result of the publicity leaflet which was distributed through various outlets around the town during the late summer and autumn. As a result of this the Treasurer is not recommending an increase in the subscriptions for 1991.

ARCHAEOLOGY IN BERKSHIRE 1990

This Annual Day School will this year be held on Saturday 16 March at the University of Reading on the London Road site from 9:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. As usual there will be a range of speakers drawn from the ranks of the professionals and the various local societies.

The cost of the day will be £4 (with a discount for members of the Berkshire Archaeological Society and Senior Citizens). Drinks are available but those attending should bring packed lunches. Further details may be had by contacting Gareth Thomas at 63 Cromwell Road (tel. (0734) 472864).

BERKSHIRE LOCAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION

As a Society we are affiliated to the Berkshire Local History Association. The effect of this is that our members can attend their meetings. This year their Annual General Meeting will be held on Saturday 23 March at 2 p.m. at St. Agnes Church Hall, Northumberland Avenue, Reading.

Following the formal business of the day there will be a discussion about the subject of Oral History.

MYTHS AND MONASTERIES IN SOMERSET - APRIL 1991

The Society has never been ambitious enough to organise a weekend trip. However, under the aegis of the Berkshire Archaeological Society a number of successful trips have been organised over the years. The 1991 trip is planned for the weekend of Friday 26 April to Sunday 28 April when the area around Glastonbury and Wells will be visited. Accommodation will be at the Red Lion Hotel, a 15th century coaching inn situated in the Market Square at Wells.

The cost covering two nights Bed and Breakfast, two evening meals, transport and some admission charges is £99. Accommodation Single (£3 extra per night), Double or Twin all with private facilities. For further details contact either their Treasurer, James Gafford, (tel. (0734) 474308) or Edna Goodburn (tel. (0344) 425774).

CHRISTMAS DAY AT THE WORKHOUSE

About forty members and friends from the Berkshire Archaeological Society, the Friends of Reading Abbey and our own Society attended the New Year party on Thursday 10 January.

The theme this year was "Christmas Day at the Workhouse" - and in keeping with tradition many came suitably attired. After a glass of mulled wine we sat down to eat. The first course was a suitable soup prepared by Elspet Naish which was followed by meat pies and green salad. For sweets there were a variety of fruit pies and puddings culminating in a pauper's Christmas pudding and a glass of port as provided by Lady Bountiful (Edna Goodburn).

The evening concluded with some readings about the workhouse by our Chairman dressed as Master of the Workhouse (his jacket having been lent by a local undertaker!) and Elspet Naish.

Despite one or two last minute panics over possibly too many people coming and the consequent shortage of food a good time was had by all. Thank you to Elspet Naish and Edna Goodburn (of Berkshire Archaeological Society) for an enjoyable evening.

INDOOR PROGRAMME

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| 21 February | Along Bath Road and Castle Hill
Miss Lorna Jackson |
| 21 March | Annual General Meeting followed by
The Devil's Highway
Mr. James Gafford |
| 18 April | The Civil War and the Siege of Reading
Mr. Eric Stanford |
| 16 May | Church Monuments since 1600
Professor Brian Kemp |

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

SUMMER WALKABOUTS

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| 9 May | A Visit to Henley led by Mr. Norman Wicks
(meet at 7:00 p.m. at the Town Hall) |
| 20 June | A Walkabout in Tilehurst led by Mr. Ken. Major
(details available later) |
| 11 July | A Visit to Abingdon led by Mrs. Joan Dils
(meet at 7:15 p.m. in the car-park to
the right before crossing the river) |

THE TOWN HALL LECTURES

Following on from the success of last year's Town Hall Lectures the series this year will look at the history of Berkshire. These lectures organised jointly by the University of Reading and the Museum and Art Gallery will be held on alternate Wednesdays at 7.30 p.m. in the Victoria Hall.

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| 6 February | The Early Settlement of Berkshire
Professor R. Bradley |
| 20 February | The Romans in Berkshire I
Professor M. Fulford |
| 6 March | The Romans in Berkshire II
Professor M. Fulford |
| 20 March | The Saxons and Vikings in Berkshire
Dr. H. Harke |
| 3 April | The Making of Mediaeval Berkshire
Dr. G. Astill |

Admission is £2.10 per lecture at the door or £10 for the series.

1991/1992 PROGRAMME

The Secretary is already working on next season's programme which members will recall is to feature some of the surrounding villages. Any suggestions for this programme or for other activities will be welcome.