



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 1991

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

It has to be said that the attendance at the Annual General Meeting held in March was disappointing. There being no other nominations the Officers as shown at the head of this Newsletter were re-elected for a further year. Similarly, the only other members of the Committee who were re-elected were Graeme and Elspet Naish. Under the Constitution there should be a minimum of four Committee Members in addition to the Officers. The Committee has the power to co-opt members. If you are interested could you get in touch with one of the Committee, please?

In reviewing the year the Chairman expressed pleasure at the number of speakers drawn from the Society's own members.

1991 SUBSCRIPTIONS

It was decided not to increase the subscriptions this year and thus it represents good value. If you have not already paid there should be a form included with this Newsletter.

WALKABOUTS

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| 20 June | A Walkabout in Tilehurst led by Mr. Ken. Major
(meet at St. Michael's Church at 7 p.m.) |
| 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) |

FRIENDS OF READING ABBEY

The Friends of Reading Abbey will be holding their annual picnic in the Abbey Ruins on Tuesday 18 June. Further details from James Gafford (tel. 474308).

ARCHAEOLOGY IN BERKSHIRE 1990

The annual day school organised by Berkshire Archaeological Society reviewing the previous year's activities was held on Saturday 16 March with speakers from the professionals and the local societies.

Steve Ford of Thames Valley Archaeological Services spoke of surveys in the Loddon Valley which revealed several settlements. He was followed by Graham Keevil of Oxford Archaeological Unit which has looked at the area where the Reading Business Park is being developed. Again evidence was found of settlements at different dates. At Uffington investigations at White Horse Hill had shown that the well-known white horse was made of packed chalk rather than being cut into the side of the hill as previously thought. The soil beneath the horse has been dated to 900 B.C. using the latest techniques.

David Hopkins, from the County Archaeologist's team discussed their role in planning applications. By reference to the computerised Sites and Monuments Record which has details of all manner of things from paleolithic sites to pill-boxes it is possible to evaluate potential development. For a site rich in archaeology a developer can be required to pay for excavation and preservation. Once any excavation has been carried out it is as important to ensure that findings are recorded and published.

Ann Middleton, from Berkshire Industrial Archaeology Group, outlined the recording a no demolished building in Sackville Street, Reading, which belonged to the local Co-operative Society. Until transferred to Grovelands Road it was a steam bakery supplying bread to Slough and Newbury. The building had later been used as a dairy store and latterly as a butchery - the rails and hooks being visible until the last in the various cold stores. The other building being recorded by the group is a well-known, indeed world-famous, Reading landmark namely the now empty Huntley and Palmer's factory in King's Road.

Godwin Arnold spoke of his research into the sculptor, George Simonds. Three things about him had proved to be untrue. His best-known work is the Forbury Lion of which it is said that the position of the legs is incorrect. He had researched this and there is a moment when a walking lion is in "dangerous equilibrium". He did not commit suicide but died 30 years after producing the lion. The Palmer statue in Palmer Park is not unique with the subject sporting an umbrella. He was also a competent falconer and for many years Chairman of the family brewery.

Joan Dils spoke about the use of local materials in 17th century buildings. In 1589 Reading ordered that rooves were to be tiled rather than thatched (because of the fire risk) - offenders were fined in tiles! The first brick-maker recorded in Reading in 1620. The work-house, the Oracle, built in 1627 was of brick - behind an ornate stone gate-house.

Stan Ford from Newbury showed how he had constructed a scale model of the 4th century church at Silchester. This involved comparing it with similar buildings and looking at the relative lengths of the sides from the remaining foundations. Not being content with the exterior appearance he had attempted to show the interior and how it might have been decorated.

READING'S CONNECTION WITH GALLIPOLI AND THE CRIMEA

More epic deeds seem to have been enacted at the Dardanelles than at most other places. For instance the Dardanelles gets its name from Dardanus, the mythological founder of the city of Troy, and a descendant of his, Priam, was King of Troy, at the time of the Trojan war c1200 B.C.

But before this Ino, queen of Aeolia, was planning to sacrifice her stepson Phriksos and stepdaughter Helle in a primitive fertility rite. So Phriksos and Helle attempted to escape by flying away on the back of a ram with a golden fleece which had been sent by Zeus, but as they were crossing the Dardanelles Helle fell off and was drowned which gave the strait its alternative name of the Hellespont.

The modern ferry across here runs from Canakle on the Asian side to Sestos on the European side.

Coming now to modern times 1990 commemorated the 75th anniversary of the allied landings at Gallipoli which is the reason for this article. From the afore-mentioned ferry one can see the Turkish memorial to their unknown soldier of the First World War. Memorials to the memory of all the actions engaged in this combat have been erected at different sites on the peninsular and several cemeteries of war graves can be seen as well as many of the trenches dug at that time. There is also a museum of relics of the battle.

From the point of view of The History of Reading Society it was here in August 1915 that Trooper Fred W.O. Potts of the Berkshire Yeomanry won the first Victoria Cross awarded to a man from Reading. He stayed with a wounded comrade for 48 hours in no-mans-land and eventually succeeded in dragging him foot by foot 600 yards to safety using a shovel as a sledge. He had been educated at Alfred Sutton school in the Wokingham Road. His daughter still lives in the town.

V.C.'s which were first awarded during the Crimean War were made from the metal of captured Russian cannon. One of these guns used to stand on Forbury Hill but was removed at some time during the Second World War. I wrote to the Parks Department to ask whether it too had been melted down to be recast as V.C.'s. They were unable to answer this but agreed with me that it would be nice to think so.

The Crimean War is perhaps best remembered for the charge of the Light Brigade immortalised by Alfred Tennyson, poet laureate. One of the survivors of that charge was Lieutenant Edward Phillips of the 8th (Royal Irish) Hussars. He had enlisted in 1851 aged 21 and was commissioned in 1854. In April of that year his regiment went out on active service. The ill-fated heroic charge took place at Balaclava on 25 October 1854, Lieutenant Phillips having his horse shot and killed under him during the action. He was gazetted captain in 1856 and after his service with the Hussars became an adjutant with the Ayrshire Yeomanry with the rank of major. He came to Reading in 1880 and lived in Marlborough Avenue until his death on 18 April 1915 in his 85th year when he was buried in St. Peter's churchyard at Earley in the grave that also held the body of his wife Mary Anne, who had died in 1892 and of their fifth daughter Elizabeth Frances who had died in 1886 aged nine years and six months. His tombstone can still be seen there with the inscription still clearly legible.

Norman Wicks

1991-1992 PROGRAMME

At the Annual General Meeting the Secretary outlined the 1991-1992 which is to cover some of the many and varied villages of Berkshire.

The provisional programme as the beginning of May is:

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| 19 September 1991 | Earley in the Nineteenth Century
Mrs. Joan Dils |
| 17 October 1991 | Hurst and the Royal Court and Twyford and the Road to Bath
Mr. Frank Lacey |
| 21 November 1991 | The Public Services of Purley
Mr. John Chapman |
| 13 December 1991 | Some Riverside Villages: Mapledurham and Pangbourne
Mr. Norman Wicks |
| 9 January 1992 | The Romans in Berkshire?
New Year Party |
| 20 February 1992 | Another Riverside Village: Wargrave
Mrs. Ann Middleton |
| 19 March 1992 | Annual General Meeting followed by
Village Life in War-time
Mrs. Nancy Saunders |
| 30 April 1992 | Some East Berkshire Villages and the Domesday Survey
Windsor, Waltham St. Lawrence, Winkfield
Mr. Luke Over |
| 21 May 1992 | to be arranged |

It will be seen that an attempt has been made to give a slightly different approach each month - in the hope that this will make the program of wider interest.

BERKSHIRE OLD AND NEW

This is the title of the annual magazine produced by the Berkshire Local History Association to which this Society is affiliated. The eighth edition has just been published at £3 and copies may be obtained from Ann Middleton (tel. 505548).

THE BLAGRAVE AND BLAGROVE PEDIGREE

Anyone living in Reading knows that the Blagrave family has a long connection with the town. A paper detailing the Pedigree of the family has been sent to the Secretary. Anyone wishing to consult it is, of course, welcome to do so.