



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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AUTUMN 1990

1991-1992 PROGRAMME

Barley in the Nineteenth Century

Mrs. Joan Dils

Joan Dils as one of our founders and an Honorary Member needs no introduction.
19 September 1991

Hurst and the Royal Court and Twyford and the Road to Bath
The local manors and some of the people who lived there

Mr. Frank Lacey

Frank Lacey is a founder member of the Twyford and Ruscombe History Society.
17 October 1991

The Public Services of Purley

Mr. John Chapman

John Chapman is an active member of Project Purley who has made an extensive study of the history of the various services and utilities in the village.
21 November 1991

Mainly Mapledurham with a little Family History

Mr. Norman Wicks

One of our members who for many years organised outings for a local rambling club and always provides us with a wealth of information.
12 December 1991

The Romans in Berkshire?

New Year Party

9 January 1992

1991-1992 PROGRAMME (continued)

Fred Padley Memorial Lecture: Adult Education and the Amenity Movement
Mr. Ken Major
30 January 1992
(further details to follow)

The Industries of a Riverside Village: Wargrave
Mrs. Ann Middleton
Another of our members who is also Chairman of Berkshire Industrial
Archaeology Group.
20 February 1992

Annual General Meeting followed by
Village Life in War-time
Mrs. Nancy Saunders
One of our members who can speak from experience having been a farmer's wife
at the time.
19 March 1992

Some East Berkshire Villages and the Domesday Survey
Windsor, Waltham St. Lawrence, Winkfield
Mr. Luke Over
Luke Over is Secretary of Berkshire Archaeological Society and the author of
several local history books - particularly about the Maidenhead and Cookham
area.
30 April 1992

Thatcham Road Names
Mr. Roy Tubb
Roy Tubb is an active member of Thatcham Historical Society and the author
of a recent book tracing the derivation of the names of roads in Thatcham.
21 May 1992

A Walk around part of Central Reading
led by Mr. Ken. Major
11 June 1992

A Walk around Nineteenth Century Earley
led by Mrs. Joan Dils
9 July 1992

All the indoor meetings other than the Fred Padley Memorial Lecture start at
7:30 p.m. in the Abbey Gateway Room, The Forbury.

JOAN DILS

We are naturally delighted that Joan Dils who was one of the founders of
the Society is coming to open the new season with a talk on Earley in the
Nineteenth Century as well as showing us around the area next July.

As well as running courses in Reading her talents have been recognised
elsewhere as she is now an Associate Tutor at Rewley House in Oxford.

MEMORIES OF WOODLEY AERODROME

In 1929 Phillips and Powis were motorcycle agents with premises at 34 West Street, now part of the Reading Co-operative Society, and in that same year Charles Powis bought a 100 acre field in Woodley from the owners of Sandford farm where he laid out an airfield and in 1931 started the Reading Aero Club. This new airfield meant the closing of part of Tippings Lane which connected the old part of Woodley at Headley Road East, which was traditionally known as 'the city' at Woodley, with Sandford.

Several famous people in Aeronautics flew into and from Woodley in those early days, Amy Johnson, Alan Cobham, Tommy Rose, and Jean Batten amongst others and in 1931 Douglas Bader flying a Bristol Bulldog crashed on the field and as a result lost both his legs. He was only 21 then but carried on flying and became one of our best Battle of Britain pilots.

In the following year, 1932, Frederick George Miles visited the airfield. He was an aircraft designer and as a result of his visit joined Phillips and Powis in the manufacture of airplanes. He moved to Woodley and lived in Lands End House with his wife, Blossom, also an airplane designer. The factory started producing the Miles Hawk, a light aircraft which cost a mere £395. In 1937 the Miles Magister was produced as a trainer for the R.A.F., over 1,000 being made at Woodley. During the war the factory went on to night and day working, building several types of plane for the air force, the Miles 20, 28, 41 and the Miles Martinet amongst them, employing 6,000 people at one time, the airfield being requisitioned by the R.A.F. for use as an elementary flying training school. The Falcon Hotel on the field was converted for use as the officers' mess. It is still in use today as a night club known as the Gatzby. And a museum of aeronautical memorabilia is at present being organised in a converted hangar.

On the coming of peace production reverted to civilian planes, the Gemini, Aerovan, and the Miles Marathon but the company failed to show a profit and early in 1948 was forced to close and was sold. Part of it was bought by Handley Page who kept it going for a time building the Marathon and the Dart Herald.

I seem to have been connected with the airfield at various times. I had enjoyed my first flight on 25 May 1928 from a field alongside the Henley Road at Caversham and it cost me 5/-. For that money I was airborne for about ten minutes in an Avro biplane piloted by Captain Phillips, D.F.C. Three years later the Reading Aero Club was formed and I was sent there by my employers to arrange the supply of a glass fronted trophy cabinet. My next visit of note was in 1945 after VE Day when I had been posted to Turnhouse to join a squadron which was being formed to fly to Norway and take over the aerodromes from the Germans. Before leaving I obtained 48 hours leave and straight away flew down to land at Woodley, where my home was at that time. After demobilisation I found my first employment in the Miles aircraft factory where I remained until its closure in 1948.

The entire life of the airfield was little more than twenty incident-packed years. Now all that area has been redeveloped and a dozen or so street names commemorate its past, Spitfire Way, Miles Way, Sopwith Close, Wright Close etc.

So it will never be forgotten.

Norman Wicks

AN APOLOGY

In copying the dates for the programme from last year (such benefits accrue from use of a word processor!) the date of the December meeting was incorrectly shown as 13 December in the last Newsletter. It should, of course, be 12 December.

CONGRATULATIONS

Congratulations are due to one of our newer members, K. Cosgrove, who has recently been awarded his doctorate by the University of London. His thesis entitled "The American Anti-Colonial Tradition and International Accountability for Dependent Peoples" is shortly to be published.

The Committee is hopeful that it might prove possible to have a talk based upon this enthralling topic.

PUBLICITY

Over the past year there have been a number of enquiries to the Society about membership or other information. The latter have ranged from somebody asking for information about another Society (of which it happened that the Secretary is a member) and a request from America for information about uniforms worn in Reading Gaol when Oscar Wilde was an inmate. Fortunately, Peter Southerton who is flourishing in Charlton Kings was able to help with the latter.

PROGRAMME CARDS

As the introduction of the programme cards was so successful last season the exercise has been repeated this year. Any members who can use extras are welcome to have a supply. Having been carried away by the success of the exercise the Secretary volunteered to produce a similar card for the Berkshire Archaeological Society of which he is Press Officer!

PRESS OFFICER

We are pleased to be able to report that Mr. Norman Wicks has volunteered to write press reports of our meetings thus affording another valuable form of publicity for the Society.

A NEW COMMITTEE MEMBER

Mr. Ron. Harris who joined the Society last autumn has volunteered his services to the Committee and has been duly co-opted.

NEW YEAR PARTY

Each year the New Year Party has had a different theme with suitable food and, where appropriate, entertainment. The title of the 1992 party to be held on 9 January will be "The Romans in Berkshire?" As in previous years offers of food will be most welcome. If you are able to help in any way please let Elspet Naish know as soon as possible (tel. 872166). Tickets price £3 will be available from the October meeting.