

# The History of Reading Society



Feb 2000

The object of the Society is to cultivate interest in and to encourage research into the history of the town of Reading

|                    |                 |                  |
|--------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| Hon Secretary      | Chair           | Hon Treasurer    |
| Mr P Russell       | Mr J Dearing    | Mr R Hutchinson  |
| 5 Wilmington Close | 27 Sherman Rd   | 19 Rosehill Park |
| Woodley            | Reading RG1 2PJ | Caversham        |
| Reading RG5 4LR    |                 | Reading TG4 8XE  |
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## A Royal Wedding.

A talk by Norman Wicks about Reading Abbey and the Consequences of a Royal Wedding will be held on the 16 March.

The talk will be preceded by the **Annual General Meeting**

(see last page for details).

## Local History.

The presidential Address, on Local History from 19th century advertisements, will be given by Dr Cecil Slade on the 6 April.

## Subscriptions for year 2000.

Your subscription became due from the first of January. Bob Hutchinson is waiting for your cheques.

Single member £9 or £6 concession. Couple £12 or £9 concession

## Appeal for help

Will the lady who spoke to Mr Michael Paxton about the Huntley and Palmer factory in France please get back in touch with him.

Telephone 0118 947 2113

## Victorian Reading

There will be a 'Saturday School' about Victorian Reading on 17 June 2000 from 10 am to 4.30 pm. Further information from Reading University Department of Continuing Education, London Road.

## Grave Matters (JBD)

Following our recent series of excursions around the necropoli of Reading and Caversham under the tutelage of Mr Ron Walker, we are grateful to an occasional guest at our meetings, Mr John Sharman, for bringing to our attention a document showing the scale of charges at Reading Cemetery in 1904. There is room here only for a brief selection.

| DESCRIPTION  | Purchase of Ground | Cemetery Fee | Vicar's Fee |
|--|--------------------|--------------|-------------|
| <b>PURCHASED GRAVES</b>  | £ s d              | £ s d        | £ s d       |
| Family Grave in perpetuity, 10 ft. deep.                                 | 4 4 0              | 1 10 0       | 0 5 0       |
| Brick in perpetuity, 10 ft. deep.  | 8 8 0              | 4 4 0        | 1 11 6      |
| Vault in perpetuity, for 12 coffins, 10 ft. deep.                        | 12 12 0            | 4 14 6       | 1 11 6      |
| <b>RESERVED GRAVES</b>   | Child under 10     | Adult        | Vicar's Fee |
| Single Internment in Reserved Ground, 10 ft deep                         | 1 0 0              | 1 10 0       | 0 5 0       |
| <b>COMMON GRAVES</b>   | Child under 10     | Adult        | Vicar's Fee |
| Single Internment in Open Ground   | 0 7 0              | 0 12 0       | 0 5 0       |
| <b>MISCELLANEOUS CHARGES</b>   |                    |              | £ s d       |
| Removal of corpse from other places of Interment to Brick Grave or Vault |                    |              | 1 1 0       |
| Removal of corpse from other places of Interment to Family Grave         |                    |              | 3 3 0       |
| Interment of a Still-born Child  |                    |              | 0 2 6       |

In those days, the cemetery had an office at 9 Cross Street, which was open from 10 to 4 o'clock.

## Our new home (JBD)

The Abbey Baptist Church is probably one of the newest church buildings in Reading but in terms of its pedigree it is one of the oldest of the Nonconformist foundations. It had its origins in the earliest meeting of Baptists which was occasion of several visits to the town by John Bunyan, himself a Baptist. By the 1740s the Baptists were meeting in Church St near St Giles under the pastorate of Daniel Turner (1710-98). Later in the century they met in Hosier Lane, where Thomas Davies, minister from 1768 to 1798 was described as "by far the liveliest preacher" in the town. A later Minister, John Howard Hinton (1791-1873) was responsible for the removal of the congregation in 1833 to a new site in Kings Road where it remained until recent times when moved to the present site. Hinton was a very distinguished theologian with 32 works listed in the D.N.B., an early leader of the temperance movement in Reading, and for several years Secretary of the Baptist Union. His ministry in Reading lasted from 1820 to 1837.

The old Kings Road chapel, which was demolished in the late 1980s was designed by the distinguished Reading architect John James Cooper (1790-1839). He also designed the Congregational Chapel in Castle Street in a broadly similar style. This is currently being converted into a "theme pub".

## **Reading, Berkshire, Pennsylvania. (GMM)**

In 1732, William Penn's son, Thomas, discussed the idea of establishing a town at the ford on the river Schuylkill in Pennsylvania. Within six months grants were issued, for land on both sides of the river, to Penn's relatives and his Quaker friends. In 1733, warrants were taken out by John and Samuel Finney for 450 acres of land, now the central river front area of the town. This was the property associated with Widow Finney, Reading's earliest known resident.

Thomas visited Reading in 1739. In a letter to his brother John, he wrote, "The inhabitants have proposed to have a country town on a piece of land belonging to us on the Schuylkill River, which I went to see and really think it a very good situation."

At this juncture it should be emphasised that Thomas Penn must be credited, in the main, for the establishment of Reading. By the time of its founding, William Penn and one son John were both dead. Another son, Richard, never visited the town and had little interest in the place. After a series of legal manoeuvres, the Penn's acquired title to "Reading" and a town was laid out in 1748.

In 1750, there was one house in the town. Two years later, when the county of Berkshire was established, there were 130 dwellings with 136 families, making a total population of 378 persons. The original population of Reading was principally German, coming from Wurttemberg and the Palatinate but the administration of public affairs was chiefly in the hands of the Quakers. The Germans gave their character, habits and language to the town. German was almost exclusively used in the ordinary transactions of life and business. Indeed, on July 8, 1776, when Henry Vanderslice read the Declaration of Independence on the square, it was read in German.

The brewing of beer started early in the town's history. One report makes not of the fact that townfolk assembled at Coglehoops' inn to get his rolls and beer. Another that Daddy Heist was celebrated as the best brewer in the borough.

Originally, Reading was a part of Alsace Township, which ran down to the Schuylkill River. Reading broke away from Alsace in 1760 when 'The Township and District of Reading' was created, comprising 950 acres. Twenty-three years later, in 1783, Reading was made into a borough. It became a city in 1847, 99 years after its creation and at least 153 years before its namesake in England.

The oldest building in Reading now is the former Farr's Shoe Store building, dating from 1761. The north, south, and west walls are intact. In the 1920's the peaked roof was levelled and around 1947 the front was altered but the interior structure is original. Across the street is one of America's oldest continuously

operating banking sites. There's been a functioning bank there since 1814. The present building was erected in 1925 as the 'Farmer's National Bank' and has passed through 'The Berks County Trust', 'The American Bank', 'Meridian' and now it's 'The Sovereign Bank'. The 'Reading Eagle', originally the 'Reading Adler', is the oldest continuously published family-owned newspaper in the entire WORLD. It has been published by the same family and without interruption since 1796.

Here are a few gems from the 1848 city ordinances. They should give you some feel for life at that period.

- 1 No throwing stones at city lamps or lamp posts. Fine 1 to 5 dollars
- 2 No taking a lighted candle into a barn or stable. Fine 4 dollars
- 3 No bathing nude between sunrise and sunset between Reese's Mill and Lancaster Bridge. Fine 2 dollars
- 4 No flying kites or sending up balloons with fire attached. Fine 1 to 10dol
- 5 No keeping more than 25 pounds of black gunpowder in your house. Fine 30 dollars
- 6 No distillery slops to be left on the pavements. Fine 2 dollars
- 7 No firing cannon in the city streets, unless given permission by mayor. Fine 5 dollars for each offence.

Adapted from a speech by George M. Meiser IX, made on the occasion of the 250th anniversary of Reading PA.

### **Notice of A.G.M.**

The Annual General Meeting of the History of Reading society will be held at 7.30 pm on the 16 March, 2000 at the Abbey Baptist church, Abbey Square, Reading.

#### **Agenda**

- 1 Welcome and apologies
- 2 Approval of 1999 minutes
- 3 Matters arising
- 4 Chairman's report
- 5 Treasurer's report
- 6 Election of the committee
- 7 Election of an auditor
- 8 Any other business

The present committee members are willing to stand for re-election but other nominations will be welcome. Nominations, with the support of a proposer and seconder, can be made in writing to the secretary or from the floor of the meeting

The AGM will be followed by a talk from Norman Wicks about Reading Abbey and the consequences of a Royal Wedding.