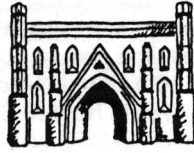


The History of Reading Society



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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August 2000

The London Street Bookshop

Norman Wicks

George Lovejoy was born in a house in Earley Yard, Minster Street of poor but respectable parents on 8th February 1808. His father was employed as a miller at the abbey mill. George began his education at a Dame school for infants and afterwards attended the National school that had been built in 1813 in the abbey ruins. In much later life he influenced the town in acquiring the area of the ruins at a time when there was a threat to raze them in favour of redevelopment.

Leaving school he was apprenticed to Messrs Smart and Cowslade, owners and publishers of the Reading Mercury where he remained until he was 24. There he learned both printing and bookselling, reported for the newspaper and travelled the countryside collecting advertisements,

During the general election of 1832, the first after the great reform bill, he had much to do with the candidature of John Walter, proprietor of the Times. Walter was elected and had a triumphant procession through the town.

In 1832 Edmund Havell, well known as an artist, who for the previous 15 years had operated a small stationery business and circulating library at 31 London street became bankrupt. George took the shop in September and commenced in business on his own as bookseller, stationer and librarian. Attached to the shop was a sitting room, two bedrooms and a warehouse for all of which he paid a rent of £25 p.a. He was supported in this by W. S. Darter, twice mayor of Reading and author of "Reminiscences of Reading" under the pen name of "Octogenarian". Darter lived opposite the shop and offered George a loan if he needed it to set up his business. In his diary for 3rd September 1832 George wrote that he rose at 6.30 a.m. to open his shop and closed at 9.30 p.m.

and, "This is my first day, may the Lord mercifully prosper the future."

For a time he continued to work for the Reading Mercury and then in March 1834 he bought the Cowslade bookselling business to add to his own, excluding the newspaper and publishing business for which he continued as type composer. About this time also he commissioned his portrait from Havell.

On August 16th 1834 Lovejoy married Martha Wilkinson at Wallingford; who had previously lived in Russell Street. Their first child a boy was stillborn but a daughter arrived in June 1836 and was christened Martha after her mother. Unhappily George's wife was consumptive and died on the 25th November 1837. In 1840 his premises were pulled down to make way for the Mechanics Institute, that dominating Ionic fronted building, and George moved a little further up the hill to those 18th century buildings numbers 37 and 39.

George's second wife was Alice Cecil, the Oxford coroner's daughter who survived him. Meanwhile his business flourished and he became friendly with many literary people, Charles Dickens, Mary Russell Mitford, Serjeant Talfourd, Charles Kingsley and others. He tried to persuade Dickens to stand as liberal candidate for Reading but the latter declared that he could not afford it.

A Baptist, Lovejoy was deeply religious and did much good in secret disliking publicity. He was an advocate of temperance, opposed war or force in any form and hated laziness. He died in 1883 aged 75 and mourning was general throughout the town. Tradesmen closed their shops and hundreds attended the cemetery. For George, though self-made, was a fine personality and a gentleman. Men such as Poynder and Golding had worked at Lovejoy's and later established their own businesses in Reading.

After his death his assistant Miss Eliza Langley who had been working with him for 21 years at the time of his death bought the shop. She continued until her own death in 1897, and was then buried in the Society of Friends cemetery in Church Street. It was Eliza who set up a brass plate in the shop recording that William Penn had worshipped at Sims court behind the shop from 1711 to 1715 whilst living in retirement at Ruscombe. Lovejoy had bought Sims court for his library. The Society of Friends had held their meetings there from 1642 until moving to Church Street in 1715.

Some years later, in 1910 William Smith obtained the ownership of the shop and bookselling continued there under his name; it had a marvellous collection of second-hand and rare books filling its attics where one could browse happily for literally hours on end. But sadly they were nearly all destroyed in a disastrous fire in 1973.

Today part of the premises is used as a restaurant and another part has become a centre for the sale of products from 'third world' countries.

Berkshire Old and New

The 'Berkshire Local History Society' have a large selection of back issues of their journal for sale and many of the topics look interesting. We can show you more details at the September meeting. If you cannot wait then get in touch with Bob Winter, phone 0118 947 7289 or

E-mail : heronisland@netscapeonline.co.uk .

The following article is a summary from the work carried out by the Emmer Green Residents Association. A free leaflet with more extensive information will be available at the September meeting, or visit the Website: www.highdown.berks.sch.uk

The name **Emmer Green** could have originated from an old Saxon word '*Eamere*' meaning 'a lake beside a stream'. Until the late 1930s it was a village on its own, separate from Caversham. Indications are that it developed as an estate hamlet dependent upon Caversham Park. It had a main pond, and some relatively old buildings, but no ancient church and no central cluster of buildings before the mid 1800s.

The land around Emmer Green contains gravel, chalk and clay. In 1654 a brick kiln was built on land called Homer's Field. The brickworks were still operational until the 1930s. Nearby underground caves were probably the result of quarrying for agriculture and during the last war stored Reading's archives. The digging for gravel and twentieth century building programmes have uncovered some prehistoric relics and implements, indicating a Celtic-Romano British settlement.

It is still possible to focus on the original village as being centred on the junction of the Kidmore End and Peppard Roads. The 16th century **White Horse Inn** has always been at the heart of village life. The adjacent smithy remained until the early part of this century. Opposite is the **Black Horse**, which was originally situated on the old Peppard Road, next to the Chapel-on-the-Hill. Beside the Black Horse was the village bakery and post office, run in the 1920s by Howards. Eventually the post office moved to the opposite side of the road. The firm of **W N & E Fisher**, carpenters, wheelwrights, and latterly builders, originated in the Peppard Road in the 1870s, and remained for over a century. Relatives of the Fishers ran a hand laundry from **Belle View House**, Kidmore End Road. **Park Farm**, the home farm for Caversham Park, was situated on land the other side of the Peppard Road, not far from the present shopping precinct. **Blenheim House** on the Peppard Road was built as the home of the farm manager of the Caversham Park estate. Two thatched cottages nearby were converted into one dwelling called **Tudor Cottage**, unfortunately demolished by Oxfordshire County Council in 1939. The **Chapel-on-the-Hill** is actually Emmer Green's oldest church. The original **St Barnabas Church** was consecrated in 1897. In 1924 Fishers laid the foundation stone of the adjacent, present church. The first proper **Emmer Green School** was built on the corner of Grove Road and School Lane in 1877.

Last century there were less than 300 people living in Emmer Green. The 1881 census contrasts the life of wealthy citizens and the ordinary people. The **Crawshays** lived in comfort in their mansion with ten servants, whilst most other folk were very poor. Small basic cottages housed a family with up to nine children. Most of the adults and the older children were employed locally in agriculture, brick making or domestic work. The **Fisher** family played a very active part in both church and community life. It was a traditional village life in a tight-knit community, and remained so until post World War II developments altered things forever. Forty local servicemen lost their lives in the two wars and are

commemorated in St Barnabas Church. Most of the young men were on active service, those ineligible were seconded to the Home Guard or became ARP wardens. Evacuees were cared for in Emmer Green, as families moved out of London. The BBC monitoring station at Caversham Park played a vital role, receiving broadcasts from all over the world. Emmer Green was not without incident. A series of small bombs was dropped from a lone German plane. They fell in a line from what is now the Emmer Green Garage, across to the golf course.

There were some fine houses and estates on the land around Emmer Green:

Caversham Park House was by far the most important house in Emmer Green and recorded in the Domesday book. The estate passed through many hands, and often entertained the noblest people in the land. In 1844 William Crawshay, the Welsh ironmaster, bought the estate. In 1926 it was sold to the Oratory School who remained there until the BBC took over.

Caversham Grove appears on maps as early as 1761 and was built in Queen Anne revival style. The house was extended on many occasions, the most significant being by Norman Shaw in the late 1870s for Frederick Saunders, chairman of the Great Western Railway. It is now part of Highdown School.

Rosehill House, set within a sixty-acre estate in the north of Emmer Green, was built in 1791. Mrs. Elizabeth Richards planted the cedar in the grounds. The house had several owners including Mr. Martin Sutton (the seed family). For a while during and after the last war it was headquarters of the Salvation Army.

SURLEY ROW CONSERVATION AREA The whole road from the Gardeners Arms pub through to the junction with the Peppard Road was declared a Conservation Area in 1988.

Illustrated Maps

Margaret Ormonde has produced a series of colourful, pocket size, history and general interest maps for the Reading area available from the Town Hall Information Centre.

History of Christ Church CE Primary School 1868-2000.

JBD

Mr Derek Crisp has made a valuable contribution to the history of education in Reading in relating the story of one of the town's oldest primary schools. In one sense it is a complete story, as the old Christchurch School closed at the end of April and New Christchurch Primary School opened in May, using the same buildings, under the government's New Start scheme. At £5.00 for 48 pages of double-column quarto, this book is attractively priced. The reader will find the details of Victorian school life of particular interest, not least the case of a boy called Smith who stole some money from the school and was flogged with twelve stripes! Material derived from official records is neatly interwoven with reminiscences from former pupils and there is also a wealth of illustrations. Copies may be obtained from the school in Milman Rd, but for most the readiest source of supply will be the Town Hall Information Centre.