

*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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Dr CECIL SLADE

Died 15 January 2001 in his 80th year

An Appreciation

The Society announced the death of its President, **Dr Cecil Slade**, at its meeting on 15 February.

This is the first opportunity to publish a short appreciation of the help and inspiration that he gave through his long association with the Society.

John Dearing, Chair said in his review at the Annual General Meeting in March that it was sad indeed to have had news of Dr. Slade's death. "He had been the Society's President for some 12 years. Certainly since I have been a member of the Society some of Dr. Slade's lectures have been among the most memorable, even where ostensibly the subject matter seemed (in Carlyle's terminology) 'dry as dust'. Who could have imagined that *Reading's*

Mediaeval Court Rolls would have proved such an entertaining subject? The Society was represented at Dr. Slade's funeral in January and made a donation to Macmillan Cancer Care in memory."

Bent Weber at the February meeting said that Dr. Slade had been associated right from the Society's beginning by giving a talk in 1979 about *the Borough of Reading in the 19th century*. This was followed by 8 more talks over the years about Reading's history, biennially in the years of his presidency, culminating in

2000 by *Advertisements - local history around Reading in the 18th century*.

Sadly we shall never know what gems he would have had for us that evening with his paper entitled *The Battle of Maiwand and the Forbury Lion*.

He went on to draw attention to Dr. Slade's lifetime association with Reading, Earley and the University where he taught both history and archaeology over his long career there.

Personally he found Dr. Slade a very generous speaker, always willing to offer yet another talk without hesitation: he will be greatly missed by the Society. At this point those present at the meeting stood for a minute's silence in Dr. Slade's memory.

The Society has since learnt from Dr. Slade's family that his work on mediaeval Reading will be published in the near future as a lasting memorial to him and a firm base about Reading's long history.

John Dearing, Chair
Bent C Weber, past Chair.

May 2001

Late Subscriptions

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Visit to Holy Trinity Church 19 July

The visit has been confirmed by the Vicar, The Revd J M R Baker. Mass will be said in the Church at 7 pm and will last about 25 minutes. The Vicar says that any of our Members who wish to attend will be very welcome. Our visit will commence at 8 pm and we will be conducted round the Church by the Curate who is Fr Charles Card-Reynolds. The Vicar regrets that he will not be able to be present himself. He says that he hopes we have a profitable and enjoyable evening and is glad that we wish to visit Holy Trinity.

Proud Heritage - The Kempe Windows of St Luke's, Erleigh Road by John Starr

"All Mr. Kempe's work is celebrated for its beauty and artistic feeling, but in St Luke's windows he has certainly excelled himself. The colours are perfect the drawings of the figures are exquisitely beautiful, and the nearer one approaches the more beautiful they seem to be." St Giles Parish Magazine, July 1892

Mr. Kempe has excelled himself

Many must have gazed at the east (apse) windows at St Luke's - but how many were aware they were seeing work by C.E.Kempe, the renowned Victorian glass artist? It was only a few months ago, when St Luke's hosted a visit from the Kempe Society, that I appreciated the significance of the apse (and other) windows as I walked around with members as they identified and photographed Kempe's work

The Tractarian Artist C.E.Kempe.

Charles Earner Kempe, was born in 1837, developed a severe speech impediment which, he realised, would prevent him becoming a clergyman. He decided that, 'if he was not permitted to minister in the Sanctuary he would use his talents to adorn it'.

He began putting his design skills to work while studying architecture with his friend George Bodley's firm and was soon trusted with the decoration of walls, ceilings and window designs for the churches (e.g. the Bishop Hooper memorial window in Gloucester

Cathedral) that Bodley was building or refurbishing in the, 'correct Gothic manner'. Kempe became more and more drawn to stained glass as a means of establishing the Christian message and, by 1866, was working as an independent designer. An intensive study of medieval glass inspired him to adapt his style to harmonise with the atmosphere of old and new churches.

By 1869 he had started his own London workshop and by the end of the century he was employing 50 people. Unlike the other large Victorian studios, he never allowed his work to deteriorate. His studio also produced designs for church furniture, including reredos, and even vestments!

From 1895 the studio adopted the 'wheatsheaf' (from the Kempe family crest) to sign their work. However the St Luke's apse window predates this (1892) so you will hunt for it in vain.

Kempe died in 1907, but by his wish the studio continued using the name of C.E.Kempe & Co Ltd under his younger cousin. To distinguish this glass from that produced by the Kempe studio, a 'tower' was added to the 'wheatsheaf'. This can be seen in the later, post 1907, windows.

As the Gothic cult faded and the years of the Depression set in the demand for expensive memorials died and, after 60 years and 4,000 windows, Kempes' closed in 1934. But scholarly opinion considers that Victorian art reached its zenith as much with Kempe as with Morris or Burne-Jones.

St Luke's lights

So much for the background, but what of St Luke's windows? Basically the east (apse) windows, or lights, portray Our Lord and eight of his disciples in the upper parts and scriptural scenes connected with Our Lord after His resurrection in the lower parts. Look carefully and you can identify the disciples by their initials Surmounted by a crown - there are several 'floating' near their heads. Are some initials ascribed to the wrong disciple?)

It is likely that the money ran out before all the windows were completed, hence only five Kempe lights, not seven!

The only Kempe light in the north aisle is of Saint Katherine. There are three lights in the Lady Chapel: Saints Mary and George, The Crucifixion and Saints Michael and Luke. The latter window carries the dedication of the Wait family in memory of their son killed in the First World War. (This window suffers from some inferior repairs).

It is appropriate to close with another quote from the St. Giles Magazine of 1892: "St Luke's has good reason to be proud of this new

addition to its beauty".

I am grateful to the Vicar, Rev. Nigel Hardcastle, for access to Parish records.

Reading Police Force Norman Wicks

Towns were once kept in order by watchmen walking the streets, one of their duties being to rid the town of beggars and vagrants. Throughout the night they walked the streets carrying lanterns, calling out the hours and making sure no robbers were abroad. That, at least, was the intention but being poorly supervised they tended to avoid trouble spots and could often be found the worse for drink. This was an unsatisfactory state of affairs so in 1829 Sir Robert Peel established The London Metropolitan Police Force by act of parliament and this proved a great improvement; in 1835 another act empowered local authorities to do the same.

The Reading Watch Committee reported on the 7th of January 1836 that in their opinion 19 constables, a corporal and a sergeant would be necessary to cover the area. Six weeks later the force was set up with 34 members including two inspectors and two sergeants. They wore buttoned and belted tunics reaching down to the middle of the calves of their legs, top hats and boots. They carried lanterns, rattles and truncheons. The constables' pay was two shillings per day and the police station was at No. 6 Friar Street, which had previously been the headquarters of the Watch Committee. The prison was in what now is Greyfriars church which was unroofed and divided lengthways by a wooden partition with women on one side and men on the other. The prisoner's food was bread and water but they were allowed to beg for alms with which to buy better rations.

The Watch Committee oversaw the police for the first three years after which an inspector from the Metropolitan Police was appointed who later became known as the Chief Constable. In 1862 the police station and coroner's court opened in Highbridge House, which still stands immediately south of high bridge. Later still, in 1912, the police station moved to Valpy Street, into the buildings from which Reading Extension College had just moved, going to London Road. This provided living accommodation for 27 constables and room also for the Magistrates' Court in its early days. They remained there until the Butts Centre provided them with their present premises in the early 1970's.

The first police car, a 12h.p. Austin, was bought in 1924 and

mainly used by Thomas Burrows the Chief Constable for his numerous duties around the town. The car was a great improvement over the pedal cycles and four years later he added two motorcycle combinations to his establishment. Police boxes had been in use from 1917 onwards.

The first woman constable was officially enrolled in 1941, now they are a common sight around the town. Unpaid Special Constables were used as early as 1868 to help on special occasions and were officially recognised by the 'Special Constables Act' of 1923. Police dogs were introduced in 1961.

On the first of April 1968 Reading Borough Police were amalgamated with the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire county forces and the Oxford city force to form the Thames Valley Constabulary. This brought to an end 132 years of the Reading Police Force.

In pre-war days I lived in Caversham where my father managed an off-licence in Prospect Street. Caversham police station was then on the corner of School Lane a few yards away. The constables were a familiar presence on the streets in those days, they knew all of us locals and we knew all of them. On night beats they would try the doors of all the shops as they walked around. One night my father heard this rattling and leaned out of the bedroom window to challenge the intruder. The constable called in the shop the next day to have a laugh about it and my father said, "If I leave a bottle of beer outside the cellar door and find it empty in the morning I shan't have to worry where it's gone to shall I?" This became a nightly occurrence and was greatly appreciated.

I used to ride a motorcycle then and once when my tail light burned out I continued to ride without it. Going home one night I swung into Oxford Street where the policeman was chatting to Sid Bert the cycle shop owner on the corner of Short Street. As I went by he said to Sid, "There goes young Wicks without a rear light again." I wonder if it was the nightly bottle of beer that saved me from being charged?