

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 2020

No 54

NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Society's AGM will take place online via Zoom on Wednesday 21st October 2020, following that evening's presentation by Joy Pibworth.

AGENDA

1. Welcome and Apologies
2. Approval of Minutes of 2019 AGM
3. Matters Arising
4. Chairman's Report and Review.
5. Treasurer's Report
6. Election of Officers and Committee for 2020/21

Present Officers	
Chairman	David Cliffe
Vice Chairman [and News Editor]	John Dearing
Secretary	Vicki Chesterman
Treasurer	Malcolm Summers*
Present Committee	
Caroline Piller [Programme Organiser]	
Sean Duggan [Archives and Publicity]	
Joy Pibworth [Minutes Secretary]	

*Also Archivist.

All current members are prepared to stand again with the exception of Sean Duggan who has stood down from the committee with immediate effect. This means there are now **two** vacancies on the committee, and we would welcome nominations.

Any other nominations with names of proposers and seconders should be submitted to the Secretary, prior to the meeting.

7. To elect an Independent Examiner of Accounts.
8. Any Other Business

THOUGHTS FROM THE CHAIR

The HoRS committee has just held its first meeting since the one in January, “on the Zoom platform,” as they say. It was all a bit unnerving, not least because I kept wondering, “Do I really look that colour?” and “Do I really sound like that?” Also, the fraction of a second between seeing the lips moving and hearing the strangely distorted voice is distinctly off-putting.

However, it was a good meeting, which we really needed if we weren't going to let the Society sink into some kind of premature hibernation. So, as those members who use e-mail will already know, the talks in September, October, November and December will go ahead on the dates already set, but some of them will be different. They are available to members only, and to join the meeting, the members will have to book with our Secretary, Vicki Chesterman. So, apologies to those who don't use e-mail or Zoom, but it seemed better than holding on and hoping. Reports on the talks will appear in the newsletter in due course.

Interestingly, the decision to hold “Zoom” meetings seems to have been justified by the number of members wanting to join them, and by the number of people who have joined the Society in order to be able to join the meetings.

Your committee also discussed the 2020 Annual General Meeting. The papers were prepared in March, but the meeting couldn't take place. A “virtual” AGM will be added on to the end of our talk on October 21st. The papers have been circulated with this newsletter. Please contact our Secretary, Vicki, if there is anything you'd like raised at the AGM.

Sean Duggan has decided to step down from the committee, after years of sterling service. Sean's departure from the committee leaves a vacancy - not only did he write reports on all of our talks, find the pictures to illustrate them, and send the reports to the local newspapers, but he produced and helped distribute posters, and looked after the Society's archives and photographs. We are grateful to him – he will indeed be a hard act to follow. **Please consider whether you feel you could help the Society by joining and taking on one of the routine committee tasks.** Any committee member, myself included, can give you an idea of what's involved.

It has also been decided to go ahead with the printing of the book on Reading pubs and breweries, and to publish it ourselves next year. The authors are John Dearing, Evelyn Williams and myself, and it's much more comprehensive than anything that has been published on the subject before. Our first publication, on Reading cinemas, was published for us by Two Rivers Press, and did reasonably well (copies still available!). This one should do even better. I wonder what other titles on Reading history there might be, deserving publication?

David Cliffe.

Ed. If you have recently joined the Society, you may also be unaware of the *Reading Book of Days*, compiled by the Society to the order of the History Press and published in 2013 – well worth acquiring and the Society does benefit very modestly through royalties!

BERKSHIRE LOCAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION

Most counties have one, and the Berkshire Local History Association was started in 1976. The History of Reading Society is affiliated, and the BLHA is affiliated to the British Association for Local History. Whilst some of what the BLHA offers is available to all, our affiliation gives HoRS members certain privileges which aren't as well-known as perhaps they should be. At present, I'm Charman of both BLHA and HoRS.

The purpose of the BLHA is to promote the study and publication of local history in the county – the “old” county including Abingdon, Wallingford and Wantage, and the “new” county, including Slough, Eton and Langley – hence the naming of its annual journal, *Berkshire Old and New*. A major part of its work is communication, through newsletters, e-mail bulletins and the journal.

The newsletter comes out in January, May and September. If you're a BLHA member you can opt to have a paper copy, but anyone can see it, including the latest edition, on the website – www.blha.org.uk. As a member of the HoRS, you can have an e-mail reminder when the new edition becomes available, by contacting Vicki, our secretary. The newsletter has short local history articles, book reviews, notices of forthcoming events and courses, requests for information, and reports from libraries, the Berkshire Record Office, and from local societies – including the HoRS.

The e-mail bulletins give information about things which crop up in between newsletters, and as an HoRS member you can receive them by contacting the BLHA website designer – webdesigner@blha.org.uk.

Berkshire Old and New is distributed to BLHA members, on paper only, but the back copies, back to 1987, can be read on the website. These contain longer local history articles, and a list of books likely to be of interest to Berkshire local historians published in the last year. There are many articles relating to Reading – such as “The Press Gang in Reading,” “The Irish in Nineteenth-century Reading,” and “A Suburban Trio: Earley, Tilehurst and Caversham”. This year's issue, to be published this autumn, will include an extended article on the women's suffrage movement in Berkshire.

The Association holds funds from which it can give grants towards local history research and loans towards getting local history published, which are looked after by the Treasurer.

The Annual General Meeting is a jolly affair, with local historians from across the county meeting and sharing and comparing notes. It moves round the county. Last year we were at Watlington House in Reading. The papers for the meeting included a brief history of the development of the “village in the town,” including Watlington House. There was a visit to the Mills Archive. Then, after the formal meeting, and lunch, we visited Wesley Methodist Church, walked around Eldon Square, looked at the front of the hospital, and ended up at the Polish Catholic Church of the Sacred Heart (formerly St. John's), where we were treated to a sumptuous spread of home-made cakes. This year we were hoping to go to Marcham, beyond Abingdon, and next year we still hope to go to Eton Wick, and to visit Dorney Court. HoRS members are invited to all these meetings.

And we are also invited to occasional local history seminars. The last one, on medieval ideas about death and medieval church memorials was held jointly with the Oxfordshire Local History Association at Ewelme Church. Participants were also invited to see the medieval murals in the nearby school. This year there was to have been a seminar on the “Swing” Riots in Berkshire, in Hungerford Town Hall, in a part of the county that was particularly affected by the disturbances of 1830. Hopefully it can be held next year. In the past, the Association has run visits to various archive repositories, and to parts of St. George's Chapel in Windsor and to Hendred House which are not open to the public.

So, it might be worth keeping your eye on what's going on at the Berkshire Local History Association. I'll try to remember to announce their events at our meetings when they resume.

David Cliffe.

NEW BOOKS

A Tale of Two Towns, by John Mullaney

This is latest title from Scallop Shall Press, and the two towns in the title are Reading and Silchester. Using archaeological and written sources, it tells the story of the people living in the area, from the earliest times up to 1121 – the year when Reading Abbey was founded. The decline and abandonment of Silchester and the rise of Reading are considered, and why King Henry I chose Reading as the site of the Abbey. The price is £12, or £14 including packing and postage.

John has made a YouTube presentation to tell you more. It can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R2C2bDwiTvQ>, or search on “A Tale of Two Towns – Mullaney.”

David Cliffe

Reading Labour 100, by John S. Partington

The book has 120 pages, illustrated in colour. Part one covers the history of the Labour Party in Reading, from its roots in the Co-operative Movement and early trade unions. There is a useful glossary of organisations and abbreviations.

Part two is the longest section and covers events in the centenary year, 2018. It includes the Kintbury commemoration of William Winterbourne's death, campaigning at Reading University about lecturers' pensions, the NHS birthday celebrations, and rail and bus passes.

These two parts are written by John Partington, an active trade unionist and Labour Party member. Part three is written by Keith Jerome and is a tour, starting from East Reading, of all the sites associated with the Labour movement. It covers the Huntley and Palmer strike of 1916, forgotten figures like Alderman Quelch, and ends with the Trades Union Club and Labour Offices in Minster Street.

The book brings together a lot of information from different sources and is a well-written short history of the subject. It is available, price £10, from the author, j_s_partington@hotmail.co.uk.

Ann Smith

Reading's Influential Women by Terry Dixon and Linda Saul

Coming this month from Two Rivers Press, this book features more than 65 individual women who have connection with Reading and who have made a notable difference in the world, including campaigners, world changers, celebrities, Olympic champions, writers, artists, a fish scientist called ET, and one of Britain's worst serial killers. The price is £9.99.

David Cliffe

The Life and Times of Oliver Dixon

Many of you will know something of this fascinating book about a Reading-based horse-dealer of Irish descent and his “lost empire” from Caroline's talk at our first Zoom meeting. If you would like to buy a copy for £12, please contact Caroline Piller: Phone: 0118 9661950/ Email: vikenzobooks@virginmedia.com. Alternatively you may like to enter the website: www.vikenzobooks.com

SAMUEL INSULL AND HIS CONNECTION WITH READING

The Reading History Society will be aware of the history of the Reading British School, notably through Daphne Joyce Barnes-Phillips' book *This is Our School*, subtitled a *Celebration of the Bicentenary of the Reading British School, Southampton Street 1811-2011*. However, a largely forgotten former pupil was Samuel Insull, who emigrated to America and went on to build a multibillion utility empire.

Samuel Insull was born in London in 1859, his parents were nonconformist, middle class and members of the Temperance movement. His father was a lay preacher and became area official for the Temperance movement in the Oxford District. The family moved to Reading in 1865. In Samuel Insull's autobiography of 1934, he states: -

"When the family moved to Reading, I went to the British School which is still there in Southampton Street, but what education of consequence I had, was obtained during residence in Oxford where we lived from the time I was eight until I was upwards fourteen. Both my elder brother and myself went to a private school in St. Johns Street (Oxford). The teachers were mainly undergraduates who were studying at the university."

When the family moved back to London, Samuel found work as a clerk in an Auctioneers office. In the evenings he took shorthand work for Thomas Gibson Bowles (editor & proprietor of *Vanity Fair*). Samuel was fired from the Auctioneers through no fault of his own but went on to become private secretary to Colonel George E. Gouraud, Mercantile Trust Company and agent to Thomas Edison. When Edward Johnson, Thomas Edison's Chief Engineer was installing the first telephone exchange in London, he enlisted Samuel Insull to help with secretarial work. Here, he even encountered George Bernard Shaw, who was involved in operating the telephone exchange. During this period, Samuel Insull read all the available documents and papers associated with Thomas Edison's work, which impressed Edward Johnson who recommended Samuel Insull for the post of private secretary to Thomas Edison (known as the wizard).

Brian Grady

THE ROYAL BERKSHIRE LIFEBOAT

On Wednesday 20 September 1865 a brand-new lifeboat was paraded around Reading, the gold lettering on its prow declaring it to be called *The Royal Berkshire*. Excited crowds followed the boat, and many went to see it afterwards in a tent at the Forbury where it remained for a few days on exhibition.

This photograph is of the new Poole lifeboat in 1865, which was a twin of *The Royal Berkshire*, made by the same boat builders and being the same size.



Earlier in 1865, Charles Stephens (Junior), a banker and Captain of Volunteers, former Oxonian and remarkable rower, had convened a meeting of interested parties to form *The Royal Berkshire Lifeboat Fund*. The small group advertised in the local papers:

"It is intended, by DONATIONS from this COUNTY, to build and present to the Royal National Life-Boat Institution, a LIFE-BOAT, with Carriage and Boat-house complete, to be called the "Royal Berkshire" Life-Boat, and to be stationed on such part of the Coast as shall be hereafter decided. Primary cost about £600. Annual ditto. £50.

"Donations towards the above object, as well as Annual Subscriptions for the maintenance of the Boat, will be thankfully received by all the Bankers in the County, and by

Captain BIRCH, R.N., Treasurer

C. STEPHENS, Jun., Esq., and

J. HENRY WILSON, Esq., Hon. Secs.

Reading"

This advertisement was published towards the end of March 1865. By the end of May a committee had been formed which included several prominent Reading men. Under the Presidency of the High Sheriff of Berkshire, the above-named men were the office holders, with the following as Members of the Local Committee:

C. J. Butler (Mayor of Reading)

Captain Cobham

Rev. A. P. Cust (Vicar of St. Mary's)

Admiral John Venour Fletcher

Rev. T. V. Fosbery (Vicar of St. Giles')

Admiral Layton

J. B. Monck, Esq.

W. G. Mount, Esq.

George Palmer, Esq.

By August 1865 the committee had raised over £300 towards the purchase, and were confident enough of the remainder to announce that the lifeboat would be exhibited as part of the Reading Industrial Exhibition in late September.

The boat, made out of mahogany from Honduras, was built by Messrs. Forrestt of Limehouse, and measured 32 feet by 8 feet, with 10 oars. It could hold up to 30 persons and was self-righting, a recent innovative design. The carriage was specially made by Robinson's of Kentish Town.

At 1pm on Wednesday 20 September 1865, four horses began to draw the lifeboat, on its carriage, around the streets of Reading. Mr Roe's brass band were in the boat entertaining the huge crowd that followed on. The carriage, leaving from Station Road, went on to Friar Street, West Street, Oxford Road, Russell Street, Castle Street, St. Mary's Butts, Broad Street, King Street, Duke Street, London Street, Albion Street, then back to Market Place.

At Market Place the crowd gathered for the speeches. The Mayor congratulated the town and neighbourhood on its provision of so magnificent a present. Captain Stephens said that so far £370 of the necessary £500 had been collected, and he was confident of the remainder being donated. Mr Lewis, Secretary of the Royal National Life-Boat Institution, then announced that *The Royal Berkshire* was to be stationed at Aberdovey "on the shores of St. George's Channel". Mr. Lewis then gave a talk about the work of the RNLI, and fireworks rounded off the proceedings. The lifeboat was moved to the Forbury, where it remained for all to see until Saturday evening, 23 September, before travelling by rail to Aberdovey. As the *London Evening Standard* put it: "The people of Berkshire, although residing inland, will by means of their own lifeboat be aiding directly in carrying on the great work of saving life from shipwreck".

The Aberdovey lifeboat station had been in place since 1837 and their boat, *Victoria*, had come to its retirement age. Their new boat, *The Royal Berkshire*, operated there until its own retirement in 1886.

Malcolm Summers

CAN WE HELP YOU?

The Society has quite a wide national and even international profile these days and we thought readers would like to hear of two queries we were able to follow up. *Vicki Chesterman writes:*

In late 2019 the History of Reading Society were approached by the Wherwell History Group from Hampshire. They wrote –

“Bit of a longshot? Wherwell History Group have been gifted around a dozen photos of members of the Annell family (some of whom lived in Chilbolton [a village neighbouring Wherwell]) taken 80 or more years ago. In this photo Rose Annell was married to Ernest Kennesion with their two children Ron and Reg.

Accompanying the photo is an address (with no longer valid phone number) for R Kennesion, 308 Gosbrook Road, Caversham, RG4 8EB, I would like to make contact and offer to return the photos given to WHG. Can anyone help? Andrew Flanagan”

I took up the challenge. As Kennesion is an unusual surname, it only took a little searching to find birth, marriage and death records for the family. All records found were in the public domain, albeit some only available on subscription websites like *Findmypast* and *Ancestry*.

This is what I found -

ERNEST ALBERT KENNESION (1879-1930) married **ROSE CAROLINE ANNELL** (1880-1975). They had 4 children: REGINALD ERNEST, RONALD WILLIAM, FELIX SIDNEY and ENID H R.

REGINALD ERNEST (1902 Winchester-1990) who married FREDERICA ELSIE HUMPHRIES in 1934. In 1965 Reginald, Frederica, Keith and Mavis were on the electoral register for 308 Gosbrook Road, Caversham. They had 5 children:

KEITH ERNEST (1935-) – no further information can be found.

VALERIE E (1937-) who married EMYR ROBERTS in 1961. Valerie was living in Caversham in 2003/4.

JUDITH R (1940-) who married GORDON BROCKBANK in 1961. They had 3 children born in the 1960's: PAUL, CATHERINE and ADAM.

MAVIS ELSIE (1944-) who married in 1965 to ANTHONY JOSEY. Remarried in 1995 to MICHAEL J WRIGHT. First marriage produced 3 children: KAREN ELIZABETH who married MARTIN R KELLY in Reading & Wokingham district in 1993; KEVIN ANTHONY who married ZOE V ANDERTON in Reading district in 2001 (in 2002 electoral register was in Reading with wife); and, GARY who in the 2010 electoral register is listed in Caversham and in the 2019 electoral register is listed in Reading.

SYLVIA IRIS (1944-) who married JOHN TREVOR MARSH. They had 1 child: STEPHEN JOHN.

RONALD WILLIAM A (1904 Winchester-1986 Southampton) who married in 1930 (Southampton) to VIOLET MARY PHILPOTT. They had 3 children:

ENID MARY (1930 Southampton-2016) who married in 1957 (Southampton) to JOHN MELLISH. They had 1 child: SANDRA

ALAN R (1932-) who married BERYL R HIGGINS in 1953. They had 2 children: NIGEL R and SUSAN J.

COLIN B (1938-) who married STELLA D HACK in 1961. They had 2 children: ANDREW and DIANE.

FELIX SIDNEY (1907 Winchester-1969) who married GERTRUDE NELLIE CANHAM in 1942.

ENID H R (1910 Hampshire)

I passed this information (and addresses found) to Andrew, with the suggestion that Gary Josey was his best bet at contact, as his address was the most current one I could find. Andrew subsequently sent a letter and the photo's to Gary, stating:

Dear Gary,

I hope this letter with enclosures reaches you safely.

Eleanor Lockyer was a local author who wrote 3 books about Chilbolton Airfield and 2 books about Chilbolton village; she died in early 2018. After her husband Alan

died last year, their daughter donated her Mum's considerable historical archive to Wherwell History Group.

Within this archive are several photos relating to the Annell family. After I posted the 1906 wedding photo on Facebook, I was able to make contact with three different strands of the extended family, but not anyone from the descendants of Rose and Ernest. I widened my search and I was very pleased to receive further information from Vicki in Caversham.

I would be very pleased to know more about your grandparents and great-grandparents and to send you image files for all the enclosed photos.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Andrew Flanagan (Chairman)

wherwellhistory@gmail.com

Unfortunately, there is yet to be a response.



Marriage of Maud Annell to Ernest Spicer 18th August 1906

Walter Sheppard (jnr), Walter Sheppard, Kate & Olive Sheppard, small girl, Fred Withers, Laura Withers with Ivy Laura May, groom, bride, Background pair, seated lady, William Annell, Ethel Annell, Caroline Annell (granny), standing lady, Rose Kennesion with Ron, Ernest Kennesion with Reg

This is the image that was sent with Andrew's message to our society.

Another query received by the Society came from The Netherlands. Ben van Drogenbroek wrote -

"Dear Madam / Sir,

I hope you can help me out with 1 inquiry.

I am investigating two R.A.F. servicemen who were imprisoned at Stalag Luft 3, the German p.o.w. camp for captured Allied Airmen.

The two servicemen are:

Leslie John Keatley (service number 1380357]

Born on 22 September 1922, Reading

Shot down on 29 June 1942 in Stirling N3706 - p.o.w. number 24940

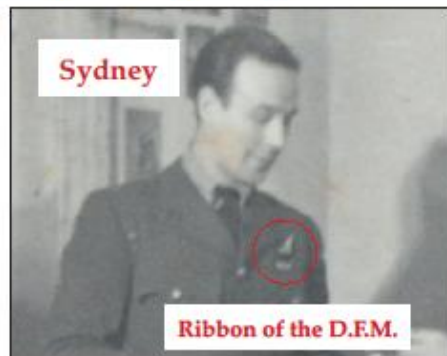
and

Sydney George Keatley (service number 142839 and 755486]
 D.F.M. on 20 April 1943
 Shot down on 24 June 1943 in Lancaster ED595 - p.o.w. number 719
 Born 1920?
 Both men belonged to 7 Squadron.
 My question is: Were both men brothers? / Nephews? / or did they share the same family name by coincidence?
 Hope you can help me out,
 Ben van Drogenbroek
 The Netherlands."



**North Compound
 1944
 Two brothers; Sydney and Leslie Keatley
 Both men served in R.A.F. 7 Squadron**

The two brothers not only served in the same squadron, they also ended-up at the same compound of the same p.o.w. camp. Sydney was captured almost exactly one year later as his younger brother.



NORTH-00012-North Compound - Syd and Les Keatley (latest update: 5 June 2020)

I was able to confirm that they were brothers. They were the sons of Herbert George Keatley and Elsie Mildred Keatley (nee Soper) who had married on 14th June 1913 in St Mary Minster, Reading. Herbert was a coach painter, boarding at 24 Field Road at the time of his marriage. Elsie was from Brownlow Road, the daughter of a traveller.

Herbert and Elsie had three children:

- Theodora Elsie who was born 3rd June 1914 and baptised in St Mary Minster in July that year. The family were then living at 53 Western Road, Reading. Theodora went on to marry Arthur W Durrant in 1936, and they had a son – Michael.
- Sydney George was born in 1920. Upon his return from incarceration overseas, Sydney had married Joan Millicent Lester in the Henley registration district in 1946, then emigrated to America. He lived in Naples, Florida, where he died on 6th June 2009, leaving behind a widow, and three children.

Sidney was awarded the Distinguished Flying Medal on 19th February 1943 (as Flight Sergeant), appearing in the London Gazette on 20th April that year (when his rank was Warrant Officer). The citation read:

"This Wireless Operator has completed 31 operational sorties [172.05 flying hours]. He has shown great keenness and enthusiasm and his efforts have been very valuable to his Captain and Navigator. He has proved himself to be a most reliable member of an aircrew and his conduct throughout these operations has been most commendable."

- Leslie John was born in 1922. The 1939 register records Leslie living at the family home – 49 Norfolk Road, Reading (where they had moved in the early 1930's) – and as a 'Roneotype' operator (office printman). This was a duplicating machine. Unfortunately, no more information can be found for Leslie than that stated above.

Elsie died in March 1952 and Herbert emigrated to Australia in August that year, setline in Arncliffe, New South Wales with his brother, Arthur, and his family. He returned to the UK in 1955 and died in Reading in 1957.

SWINGING READING Part 4

We concluded the third part of this series with a promise that number four would be the last and also the election in 1970 of Dr Gerard Vaughan. Over the previous 25 years, Reading had moved from a single constituency to two seats and back to one again, but Dr Vaughan was to be the last member for Reading only. For the 1974 elections, boundary changes devised by the Boundary Commission before the 1970 election were finally implemented, the delay being ascribed to the need to align the changes with the new system of local government due to be introduced. While there were accusations of political expediency at the time, it was certainly true that in the case of Reading, the two new seats, Reading North and Reading South, followed the borough boundary with Reading North taking in two wards, Tilehurst and Norcot, that had previous been in the Newbury constituency.

Despite the swing against Edward Heath nationally, in the February election Dr Vaughan retained Reading South with a 5,000 plus majority. However, the new MP for Reading North, Anthony Durant, had a harder fight, winning with a majority of 2,369, falling to less than 500 in the October election that followed. Dr Vaughan, however, went on from strength to strength increasing his majority to 6,666 – I wonder if there were any comments about the 'mark of the beast' at the time?

These two gentlemen continued to represent Reading in parliament for the next twenty-three years which saw the extraordinary series of four elections in a row won by Margaret Thatcher and her successor, John Major. In 1983, there were yet more boundary changes with North and South giving way to the East-West divide that we still have today. Out went any talk of aligning the constituencies to local government boundaries: Reading East included Arborfield, Barkham, Finchampstead, Shinfield, and Swallowfield from Wokingham borough and Reding West reached into Newbury as far as Pangbourne. These changes only served to enhance the swing towards the Conservatives since these country areas were obviously more likely to vote on the right. In Reading East, Dr Vaughan enjoyed majorities ranging from 11,500 to 16,200 and in the western seat, Tony Durant peaked at 16,750 in 1987. Both men benefited from a high profile, serving at various times in government and both received a knighthood for their services. Even in 1992, when nationally, Labour began to recover from its poor showing in the 80s, both Vaughan and Durant received over 50% of the votes. It is interesting to note that as Vice-Chamberlain of the Household, Durant's 'responsibilities included writing a daily report of parliamentary proceedings for the Queen, and presenting her occasional messages to the House in morning dress and carrying what looked like a snooker cue!'



Sir Anthony Durant: Photo: Photoshot

All this, though, was to change in 1997 with the advent of 'New Labour' and Reading was ready to swing once again. At least Sir Gerry and Sir Tony retired gracefully rather than having to face the ignominy of defeat. Jane Griffiths won Reading East with a 3,795 over a Tory candidate who had previously represented Slough and thought he was moving to a safer seat! At the same time Martin Salter won Reading West on a slightly lower majority over a former Tory MP and minister. Both increased their margins in 2001 but the double act came to an end in 2005 when for the first time since the 1951 election Reading returned two MPs of different political complexion. Jane Griffiths had a difficult relationship with the Reading Labour Party and was deselected but her intended successor, Tony Page, failed to attract the voters who gave a majority of 475 to Conservative newcomer, Rob Wilson, although Martin Salter held on in the west with a 4,000 majority.

He retired in 2010 and with the swing against Labour that year and the election of a Coalition government Alok Sharma then won the seat with a 6,000 majority to become Reading's first MP from the ethnic minorities, retaining it in the three succeeding elections. In 2019, he also became the town's first MP to attain cabinet rank.

Rob Wilson was a junior minister under PMs, Cameron and May, until his (perhaps) surprise defeat in 2017 by Labour's Matt Rodda. Rodda gained Reading East with a majority of over 3,700 and retained it last year with a near 6,000 margin. Here at least was a sign of Reading going decidedly against the swing, possibly an indication of the town's pro-EU majority. Let us see what 2025 will bring!

John Dearing

Members are reminded that articles including reports of any historical research they are undertaking relevant to Reading and its environs will be welcomed by the editor. It is your society and your newsletter!