

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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Winter 2020-21

No 55

JOHN WHITEHEAD



We are very sorry to have to record the death on 30 November of John Whitehead who had been a very active member of the Society, serving on the committee from 2004 until 2019. During much of that time John handled publicity and in addition when Eddy Hooper retired from the committee he kindly offered his home as the venue for the Society's committee meetings, which took place in Littlecote Drive from 2014 to 2019.

John's special enthusiasm in the field of history was transport, and in particular buses. This has a permanent memorial in the excellent account which he wrote with Ray Smith of Reading Transport during the 1940s entitled *War and Austerity*. He was also a member of the team which produced the *Reading Book of Days*, contributing some 28 stories – it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that he would quite happily have filled up all

366 pages with tales of Reading's fleets of trolley and motorbuses and the pitfalls that beset the construction of the IDR!

John's knowledge of Reading's history was encyclopaedic and the Chairman of the meeting could always rely on John to come up with a question to the speaker, even if all others present were rendered speechless. He was generally accompanied to meetings by his wife, Rosemary, to whom we extend our condolences at this sad time.

THOUGHTS FROM THE CHAIR

As 2020 draws to its close, we can look back on an extraordinary stretch of time when for almost everyone, life became more restricted and limited, and for some, more anxious and sad.

The activities of the Society were put on hold for several months. The talks and the summer visits couldn't be held – we weren't even able to make the presentation to Steve Hodge as planned. Steve was retiring as the caretaker at the Abbey Baptist Church, and his helpfulness and kindness have been much appreciated over the years.

Towards the end of the summer, things started to move. People were beginning to get together online, and the potential of Skype, Teams and Zoom was coming to be realised. Even I, an old stick-in-the-mud, eventually and reluctantly shelled out the necessary few pounds for a plug-in webcam cum microphone. And so it was that in September we were able to resume the monthly talks, on the Zoom platform, as they say. It isn't like meeting in person, but it's better than nothing.

The first four talks were all by members of the committee, and, interestingly, three of the four have all had books published during the past year – Caroline Piller, Malcolm Summers and Joan Dils. Summaries of the September, October and November talks appear in this issue.

Next year, as ever, we have a good variety of speakers and topics lined up, including some of those planned for 2020 which couldn't take place. They'll have to be via Zoom for the first part of the year, but we'll return to the Abbey Baptist Church when it's allowed, and it seems sensible to do so. The visit in July is likewise subject to any regulations which may be in place at the time.

2021 is of course the nonacentenary of Reading Abbey – and the foundation of the Abbey is probably the most important thing ever to have happened to Reading. It dominated the town for over 400 years. (Huntley and Palmers might be said to have dominated it for around 130.) Various organisations are making plans to mark the anniversary. The Borough Council is planning to celebrate on Saturday June 19th at the Waterfest. Reading University has secured funding from the Arts and Humanities Research Council for a postgraduate research project into the archaeology and heritage management of the Abbey, to start in September 2021. Hopefully this will lead to a publication, and we shall learn whether or not the survey of part of the site a few years back using ground penetrating radar revealed anything of interest. The Friends of Reading Abbey are likely to be kept very busy. They have already begun a series of "Mayor's Talks," viewable online, in which the Mayor of Reading, David Stevens, talks to an expert on some aspect of the Abbey's history.

The fate of Reading Gaol, built over part of the site of Reading Abbey, is still unclear. The Ministry of Justice announced that the Gaol had been sold to an un-named developer, and a few months later revealed that the deal had fallen through. Matt Rodda, M.P., is now asking for "signatures" on an on-line petition on the future use of the prison: "We, the undersigned, want to see it preserved and enhanced to become an arts hub and to celebrate Reading's heritage. We call on the Ministry of Justice to support this and not to sell it off to the highest bidder." You can find a link to the petition on Mr.

Rodda's website. Various figures in the media have lent their support, most notably Stephen Fry and Dame Judi Dench, so Reading may yet get its arts hub.

The History of Reading Society's first talk of the new season will be on the history of the Abbey, to be given by John Painter, Secretary of the Friends of Reading Abbey. Topics later in the year will include the Home Guard in the Second World War, old Coley, suffragettes, cinemas, gasworks, and industrial sites lying between the River Thames and the railway. By September, the new book on Reading's pubs and breweries, published by the Society, should be with us, and will be the subject of our talk for that month. And by that time also, we hope it will be possible to hold face to face meetings, to which we can invite visitors.

Whatever happens, we intend to publish four newsletters over the year, to keep in touch with our members, and especially those who cannot join the online meetings.

So I very much hope that you'll renew your subscription in good time for the first talk of the New Year on January 20th. On behalf of the committee and myself I'd like to thank our members for their continuing interest and support and wish them as happy a Christmas as can be. We look forward to seeing you, in one way or the other in the New Year, when we hope to be able to deliver a full year's programme.

David Cliffe

ST EDMUND'S CHAPEL



In John Speed's map of Reading, dated 1610, there is an intriguing chapel opposite the gates to the old Franciscan friary (marked with an A), in an almost triangular piece of land where Friar Street met the road to Caversham on the north-west corner of the town.

This is St Edmund's Chapel, built in 1204, and in spite of the small cross Speed has drawn on its top no longer in use as a chapel by the early 17th century.

So what is known about the chapel of St Edmund the Martyr?

The first connection between the town of Reading and Edmund the Martyr, who died in 869, was probably in 1163. On 8 April that year, on an island in the Thames, the trial by combat between Henry de Essex and Robert de Montford took place. Among other things, Essex was accused by de Montford of cowardice in the King's service, and of defrauding St Edmund's resting place at Bury of five shillings yearly. During the fight, Essex saw a vision of 'the glorious King and Martyr Edmund, in shining armour, and as if hovering in the air, looking towards him with severe countenance, nodding his head with a mien and motion of austere anger'. Essex was taken later from the island believed to be dead, but he recovered under the care of the monks of the Abbey, and joined their number to live out the rest of his life. The vision of Edmund became a popular story.

In 1204, a man called Laurence Burgess, or Burgeys, who was Bailiff of Reading, gained the agreement of Abbot Helias to erect a chapel dedicated to Edmund the Martyr. Helias was the 9th abbot of Reading Abbey from 1200 to 1213. He assented to the proposition that the chapel be built, as long as Burgess made sufficient financial provision to endow it. Burgess promised to give a house in New Street (as Friar Street was then called) for the chapel's maintenance after his cousin's death. At that time the house no doubt would come into Burgess's hands. The endowment of the rent from the New Street house would have paid for the services of a priest.

St Edmund's chapel was built on a triangle of ground of roughly half an acre in extent 'formed by Chapel Hill and the road leading to Caversham', according to John

Man's *History of Reading* (although he gets the date of its foundation wrong, as 1284). This area was later known as Towns End. Burgess built a hermitage next to the chapel, moved in and lived there until his death.

The next reference to St Edmund's chapel that I have found is from 1479. By this date the chapel had been there for 275 years, and for almost two hundred of those years the Franciscan friary was situated on the opposite side of the road. In 1479 John Thorne (the first of two successive abbots of that name) was in charge at the Abbey, but King Edward IV was not pleased with him. The king sent the Bishop of Salisbury (Reading was in his diocese at the time) to investigate whether the abbot was carrying out his various duties appropriately and with due diligence. The consequent 'memorial' states (with modernised spelling)

... also a chapel at the West end of the town, of Saint Edmund's, and fair lands thereto, for to have God worshipped in that chapel, wherein lie the bones of many Christian people, and now they have made a barn thereof, and put therein corn and hay, and tie therein horses and beasts...

It seems that by this time the abbey had taken possession of the chapel, and that the abbot had not only caused it to fall into disuse as a place of worship, but had turned it into a barn. The sacrilege involved in using the burial place of Christian people as a barn for beasts no doubt shocked both the bishop and king.

However, this period seems to have brought to an end the use of the building as a chapel. A few years later, in 1546, when both the friary and the abbey had been closed down by Henry VIII's agents and their land confiscated, the barn, together with its land, was in possession of one Edward Butler, who paid the king an annual rent of 13s 4d for the privilege.

Photo: Reading Borough Library collection. This photograph of a barn at Battle Farm, off Beresford Road in Reading, was taken in 1906. The barn was said to be built in part from stones from "St. Edmond's" (sic) Chapel.



Both Man's and Doran's *Histories of Reading* mention that the old chapel was converted to a strong fortification known as Harrison's Barn as part of the defences just before the Civil War's Siege of Reading in April 1643. However, this identification is disputed, with the strong possibility that Harrison's Barn was on Whitley Hill.

Coates believed the barn to have been demolished around 1760. Man believed it to have been taken down about 1750 and rebuilt on the king's manor of Battle. Doran summed it up well: the building 'has long since been demolished'.

If you have any more information about St Edmund's Chapel, please email me [malsummers@aol.com] as it would be great to add to what is known of this story.

Sources:

Rev Charles Coates, *History of Reading* (1802) pages 199, 264, Appendix IX, Corrections and Additions for p199

John Doran, *History of Reading* (1835) page 112

Ernest W Dormer, *Gray of Reading* (1923) pages 41, 145

Dr Jamieson B. Hurry, *The Trial by Combat of Henry de Essex and Robert de Montfort at Reading Abbey* (1919) page 20

Sarah Griffin, *The Siege of Redding* (1996) page 17 and map on page 29

Prof Brian Kemp, *Reading Abbey Record, A New Miscellany* pages 10, 19, 51

John Man, *History of Reading* (1816) page 296

Malcolm Summers

G HOOKHAM AND SON OF READING OR 'HOW TO LOSE AN AFTERNOON TO A PHOTOGRAPH'

It all started with a message via the Society Facebook page from a Howard Bardsley. He wrote –

“Hi there. I have an old label for a shop in Chain Street which sold metal goods, e.g. prams (or perambulators as it says on the label). In this case my 97 year old Mum who has sadly just died left us an old tin trunk (the kind in which domestic servants carried around their worldly goods); inside it has a label with the name of the Chain St shop that sold it. If you are interested and can supply an email address I will gladly send you a photo of the trunk and the label stuck to the inside lid. Regards Howard.”

Well, of course I was interested. The detective in me had been stirred and I felt the need for a bit of investigation. So, I wrote back to Howard, saying it would be lovely to see a photo of the trunk and label and gave my email address.

Back came a reply with two photos –

“Thanks for your email reply. Photos attached of my mother's forbear's tin trunk and internal label. By the way, my mother's much younger sister was Margaret Powell, the celebrated author from the 1960s and 70s who wrote the classic story of life as a domestic "Below Stairs". I guess it's possible that she may have made use of the trunk though there's no documentary evidence of it. Domestic service was very much the norm for many working class folk in the 20s and 30s and I would suspect that purchase of the trunk may have been late Victorian time, but you may have other evidence of retailing in Reading in that period.”



Now armed with the photos, I set about the hunt for information. Using online sources only, I discovered the proprietor was George Hookham. He had moved to Reading, from Chesham, Bucks, with his father Joseph and step-mother Mary (his mother Ruth having died in 1850), between 1851 and 1861. In the 1861 census George and his parents were settled at 31 Chain Street where Joseph was a broker, Mary a dressmaker and George a printer. Unfortunately, Mary died in 1864 and Joseph in November 1866. Around the time of Joseph's death, George married Sophia Metcalfe in Greenwich. Joseph left no will, but Letters of Administration were granted to George, both being identified as furniture dealers.

The first reference to George Hookham being in business is the 1869 Kelly's directory of Berkshire which lists him as a furniture broker at 31 Chain Street. In the 1871 and 1881 censuses, George is calling himself an 'upholsterer master employing 1 man'. From then on he is called a furniture dealer, broker or warehouse, or a mixture of the three. George continues at 31 Chain Street until the 1890s. By this time, he has acquired 7 Chain Street, and by 1899 6 and 8 Chain Street too. George continued to trade from 6-8 Chain Street until shortly before his death in 1931, when his only son, George Edward was running the business.

NEW AND IMPROVED PREMISES.
GEORGE HOOKHAM,
 6 & 7, CHAIN STREET, READING.
 Opposite the Post Office.
 ESTABLISHED IN CHAIN STREET OVER
 HALF-A-CENTURY.

TO MY FRIENDS AND CUSTOMERS,
 LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

I HAVE found it necessary, in consequence of increase in Trade and my old Shop being required by my landlord for other purposes, to Build New and Improved Premises on the site of my old Shop, Nos. 6 and 7, Chain Street, for so many years occupied by me. I have had this Establishment built expressly for Business only, in Four Floors. The basement, shop and first floor are each 53ft. long, and the top floor nearly of the same dimensions, thus giving me

FOUR LARGE SHOWROOMS.

Which I purpose to devote to the Display of Furniture, &c., in the following way:—

THE BASEMENT—which is wood paved and well lighted—for Painted Washstands, Dressing Tables, Kitchen Tables, Invalid Chairs, Toilet Ware, and General Stores for Boxes, Trunks, &c.

THE GROUND FLOOR OR SHOP as a Show-room for Perambulators, Boxes and Trunks, Carpets, Oilcloths, Chimney and Tilet Glasses, Furniture of every kind, Portmanteaus, Wicker Dress Trunks, Carpet and Leather Bags, &c.

THE FIRST FLOOR (over the shop) as a Show-room principally for Bedsteads, Beds, Mattresses, Bolsters, Pillows, &c. The large space at my disposal will enable me to show Bedsteads, &c., fitted up, so as to give Customers a good choice of Bedding in all Styles. Fenders, fireirons, Round Tables, Easy Chairs, Couches, &c., will also, as far as practicable, be shown in this Large Room.

ON THE TOP FLOOR I shall stock Pots, Kettles, Frying Pans, Fenders, Fireirons, Baths, Fire Guards, Buckets, Ashpans, and Dust Preventors, and other Articles of universal requirement.

REPAIRS.—Having a large Workshop at the back, I shall do any Repairs to Furniture, Perambulators, &c., as heretofore. **INDIARUBBER TYRES, &c.,** kept in Stock.

Please do me the honour of an inspection of my New Premises, when convenient to you, as you cannot judge of the extent of them from the outside, or the Shop.

In conclusion, allow me to thank you most heartily for all past favours, and to solicit a continuance of the same, which shall always have my prompt and personal attention.

October, 1893.

This notice from the Reading Observer of 28 October 1893, gives some explanation of the premises' changes.

As can be seen from the notice the family are no longer 'living over the shop' – having resided in De Beauvoir Road at no. 10, whilst renting out no. 12 in 1885, and at 40 Zinzan Street for three years from 1887. In 1891, they are to be found living at 87 Broad Street and three years later at 130 Castle Street, where they stay until 1899.

By 1901 they are back to living over the shop, so maybe the redevelopment of their premises caused a financial strain that meant having two properties was no longer a viable option.

By 1914 George Edward had moved into a home of his own with his wife Marion, whom he married in 1911.

Sophia dies in 1919, leaving George at home with his daughter, Sophia, who remains unmarried until her death in 1949. George and Sophia's other two daughters, Louisa and Nellie, had married in 1891 and 1900 respectively and continued to live in Reading.

George died on 20 October 1931 and was buried at Hemdean Road Cemetery in Caversham three days later. The National Probate Calendar shows that George was still residing in Chain Street and left effects to the value of £2,780 15s and 1d, with George Edward furniture dealer as executor.

The 1931 and 1935 editions of Kelly's directory of Reading list at 6-8 Chain Street 'Hookham and Son perambulator makers', but they are not listed under any form of furniture dealer. The 1939 edition has no listing at 6-8 Chain Street and Hookham and Son

are not listed within the directory.

By 1939, George Edward is calling himself a 'commercial traveller furniture', together with the Kelly's directory for that year implying that there is no longer a shop.

George Edward died 20 Dec 1946 and was buried on Christmas Eve at Henley Road cemetery. His wife, Marion, survived him by 14 years.

The family seem to have been very involved in Reading with George variously belonging to the Loyal Berkshire Lodge and Excelsior Lodge of Oddfellows, George's wife, Sophia, singing at a fundraiser concert for Kings Road Baptist Church. George also involved himself in local politics by supporting nominations for election candidates. George Edward became a special constable and was a sidesman at St Mary's Church.

Back to the trunk, going by the business name on the label, I would surmise that it predates 1914, as the '& son' came in somewhere between 1911 and 1914.

As an aside, and not related to this family, but the famed ballerina Dame Margot Fonteyn was born Margaret Evelyn HOOKHAM.

Images of the trunk and label are copyright of H Bardsley.

Online sources used

ancestry.co.uk

Electoral Registers for Berkshire

Street Directories

Census returns

1939 register

findmypast.co.uk

Newspapers

Wills and probate records

freeBMD.co.uk

Civil birth, marriage and death records

specialcollections.le.ac.uk/digital/collection/p16445coll4

Historical Directories

Vicki Chesterman

A WASTED DAY?

*In February we welcome David Neale of the Bell Tower Association (BTA) to talk about the area the association covers. Your editor has recently revised an account of his experiences doing odd jobs between 1971 and 1973, entitled **Diary of a Dogsbody**. Although this only includes one day spent in Reading, that day was in the area covered by the BTA....*

For some mysterious reason my services were not required at the Centre on the Friday but Maurice had rung through on Thursday to say he could fit me in elsewhere if I reported to Reading (1). Thus it was that I caught the 7.38 from Taplow on Friday morning.

From Manpower I was despatched to Whitbread's warehouse on the Cardiff Road Estate, which is situated in an area of Reading lying between the railway line and the River Thames. I had great difficulty tracking down the warehouse, chiefly because it had ceased to belong to Whitbread and was in the process of being converted by Kingham's into a Cash and Carry. Kingham's (2) seems to have disappeared from the commercial map but was, I believe, a wholesale grocery business, possibly connected with those small corner-shop grocers who operated under the 'Mace' trademark, although here my recollection may be faulty.

On my arrival I was shown a number of offices whose floors were coated with a thick distillation of dust. These I was to sweep and launder. However, I had to wait until George the Plasterer had finished practising his art on the office walls. Since George had by now retired for his breakfast, it was about 10 o'clock before I could make a start. I had nearly completed scrubbing the largest of the three offices, when the architect arrived on the scene; perhaps he had enjoyed an even later breakfast than the plasterer. Despite the impression I was making on it, he decided that 'it wouldn't do' – customers would be dealt with in this particular suite and a new floor would have to be laid. I went off to lunch

at Sid's adjacent cafe, which George had doubtless patronised earlier, and then continued with the floors of the two smaller offices, departing a little early at around 3.30, somewhat disgruntled at having been mucked about.

I wonder if any readers remember Kingham's or even Whitbread's warehouse? If you do please let me know.

(1) Although living in Taplow at the time, I was employed by the Manpower branch in Reading, which was located in Cross Street.

(2) Rather curiously it seems that Henry Kingham and Sons, wholesale grocers, popularly known as Kinghams, were acquired by the John Lewis Partnership in 1960.

John Dearing

IN CASE YOU MISSED THEM

Reports of the first three on-line talks given to the Society in 2020 follow:

The September talk was **The Lost Empire of Earley: Oliver Dixon's**, by **Caroline Piller**. This complemented her recently published book "The Life and Times of Oliver Dixon: A Reading Horseman Remembered". Oliver Dixon grew up on a farm in County Mayo, Ireland and was brought to Reading around 1879, when he was about 10 years old, by horse dealer Michael Donovan. Oliver displayed an exceptional talent for assessing horses.

Donovan bought the business from horse dealer George Reeves of Mockbeggar Farm on Crescent Road, which eventually Oliver was to own. In 1899 Oliver sold part of his land, to the Reading School Board, to build The Wokingham Road Board School – later renamed Alfred Sutton School.

Oliver built up a substantial business dealing horses, enlarging and improving his premises at Crescent Road. He was also well known and well liked in different social circles, including the aristocracy and royalty. He was a devout Roman Catholic and great supporter of many communities in Reading. Oliver died at home, Mockbeggar House on Whiteknights Road in 1939.

All that remains now is a field, a gate post and a bus stop named after his house. Caroline's presentation showed us many photos and maps of what Oliver's empire looked like over the years, which was a real eye opener!

The talk was particularly well received because many in the audience hadn't come across Oliver Dixon before, and hadn't considered the importance of horses before motorised transport, and the number of stables and repositories across Reading.

Caroline's book on the subject, "The Life and Times of Oliver Dixon: A Reading Horseman Remembered," is available from vikenzobooks@virginmedia.com or Phone 0118 9661950.

The October talk was **The cup that cheers: tea before the Victorians** presented by **Joy Pibworth**. The talk told the story of tea in England in the nearly 200 years before the concept of 'Afternoon Tea' came about.

Tea consumed in Britain before the 1840s came from China. Tea was first imported into England in the early 17th century but its popularity did not take off until after the marriage in 1662 of Charles II to Catherine of Braganza, a confirmed tea drinker. After this the popularity of tea grew enormously, was reflected in art and triggered a demand for tea ware of all sorts.

As tea was taxed at 119% it provoked much criminal activity. Smuggling, although accepted by respectable people, was a serious problem. The violence of the Hawkhurst Gang in the 1740s proved so repellent, and the gang's punishments so effective as a deterrent, that eventually tea smuggling withered away. Yet even in the 1780s the

Reading Mercury noted instances of brutality towards Excise Officers and even the discovery of four smugglers and their contraband tea near Newbury.

The *Reading Mercury* reported the Adulteration Act of 1777 which made illegal the addition of the noxious products often added to tea leaves. In 1784 the Commutation Act was passed, which lowered the tax to 12.5%, and was duly printed in the *Reading Mercury*. Tea was becoming affordable. A contemporary social commentator remarked, with some distaste, that "The lower orders are altered in every respect for the worse by tea and wheaten bread", yet boiling water led in time to improvements in health.

John Horniman, who was born in Reading to a Quaker family in 1803, went into the tea business, inaugurated sealed packets and led to Horniman's Tea becoming the biggest selling brand in the world.

November's talk on **The Grey Friars of Reading** was given by **Malcolm Summers**.

From 1233 there was a community of Franciscan friars living and working in Reading, until the dissolution of the monasteries and friaries by Henry VIII. The only remnant of their House is the nave of the second friary church, now Greyfriars Church.

The Franciscans, known as Grey Friars from the colour of their habits, were formed by Francis of Assisi in 1209, and reached England in their rapid spread through Europe by 1224. In 1233 they came to Reading, where they were allowed to settle and build on Abbey land. The first friary was most probably built just down the hill from Friar Street, beside the Caversham Road, roughly in the area where Tudor Road to Stanshawe Road, to Greyfriars Road, is now. The land was subject to periodic flooding and so in 1285 the abbey granted an extension of land at the top of the hill, where Greyfriars stands.

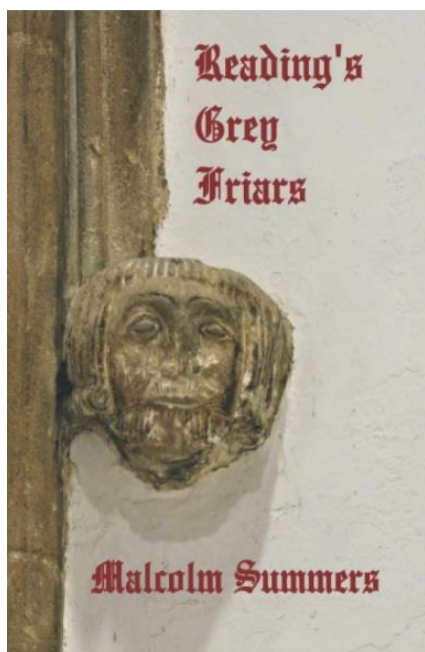
The friary, like other religious foundations, would have had a variety of buildings inside its perimeter wall, such as a dormitory, refectory, infirmary, chapter house, and a cloister. Unfortunately, with all the house building through the nineteenth century, nothing now remains of these. The friary church was in three parts: the nave (for the public), the quire (for the friars) and a walking place between them for access, with a bell tower above.

The Reading friary was built to house a Warden and 12 friars. They lived on the charity of the local people and spent much of their time out among the community, as preachers, confessors, and as beggars. They would aim to help the local people in any way that they could, and in return the locals provided them with their daily food.

The main records that survive about the Reading friary are wills, at least 41 of which mention bequests to the friary. Occasionally other documents and references help us to know a little more about the friars. There are five wardens known by name and just over 20 friars.

The friary was shut down on 13 September 1538 as part of Henry VIII's closure of all religious houses. The king confiscated anything of worth, sold off the land and its buildings (to John Stanshawe) and allowed the town's corporation to take over the nave of the church as a guildhall. Over time, this building became a poor house (known as a Hospital), a House of Correction and a Bridewell – both of these last two were types of prison. The friary church was restored in 1862-63 and became a parish church, serving the expanding population of Reading.

The full story of *Reading's Grey Friars* can be read in a recently published book of that name by Malcolm Summers. It is available from Amazon (£10 post free) or from Malcolm (malsummers@aol.com) for £8 if collected (from Tilehurst), or £9.50 incl. postage.



WAS THERE A COMMUNITY OF GREY FRIARS IN CASTLE STREET?

In John Leland's *Itinerary* there is the entry:

'On the north side of Castelle-streat was a late a fair house of Gray Freres'.

Leland travelled the country and wrote in detail about all he saw. In 1542 he visited Reading. In addition to the house of Grey Friars on Castle Street, Leland mentioned the abbey and the three parish churches of St Mary, St Laurence and St Giles. He said that it was believed that there had been a nunnery, built as penance by St Edward the Martyr's mother-in-law, possibly on the site of St Mary's church – or that it might have stood where Henry's abbey now stands. He then went into detail about several abbey issues. He finished with a discussion of the geography of the town, especially of the two rivers and the 'halowid Brooke', and their various bridges. He then departs over the bridge to Caversham for other places.

However, Leland did not mention the rather hard to miss Franciscan friary on Friar Street. The various sources who use Leland to talk about the possible Franciscan chapel on Castle Street do not notice this omission. I think that Leland got the name of the street wrong and should have written:

'On the north side of Frier-streat was a late a fair house of Gray Freres'.

Leland is then quoted by Rev Dr Thomas Tanner in his magisterial *Notitia Monastica*, published in 1744. Tanner wrote:

'A fair house of Gray friars on the north side of Castle-street, built before AD 1400. The site of it was granted to the mayor and burgesses of the corporation; who have built their Bridewell on part of it.'

It is certain, however, that it was the nave of the friary church on Friar Street that was given to the mayor and corporation and, by the time Tanner was writing, had become the town's Bridewell, or prison. This rather adds to the suspicion that there was only one Franciscan settlement, not two, and that it was beside Friar Street.

John Man in his *History of Reading* (1816) adds a lot of detail about the Castle Street Franciscan chapel building: its location, size and more. Unfortunately there is no way of knowing where he got these details from. He might have been describing a building that had been in that location that he thought may have been the chapel. Whatever had been there had been demolished by the time John Man was there to describe it.

Man argued that there was evidence that the chapel did exist in the will of Margaret Twyniho (variously spelt!). That is, she desired to be buried in the 'chapel of St Francis', and Man states that the friary off Friar Street had no chapel, and so Twyniho meant this building on Castle Street. However, Man is incorrect to say that the friary off Friar Street had no chapel. It certainly had at least one, in the NE of the nave as it is mentioned in the will of John Stanshawe (1516): 'I bequeath unto the maintenance of the light before the rood in the chapel standing in the north side... in the said friary 12d'. In fact, the quire of Franciscan friary churches was very often known as the 'chapel of St Francis', so that was probably what was meant in Margaret Twyniho's will.

Doran in his *History of Reading* (1835) suggests that the Castle Street chapel might have been a chapel of the main friary (taking this from part of what Man said). If so, among the 60 friaries in England & Wales this is the only one I know to be like it, that had a detached chapel a distance from the main friary. There were also no other locations within the English Franciscan Province with more than one separate settlement of Franciscan friars in the same town.

In conclusion, I would say that the simple solution of the mystery of the House of Grey Friars in Castle Street is that Leland got his street name incorrect, and this led to a duplication of locations. The loose end, though, is where John Man's descriptions of the chapel building came from...

Let me know if you have any more evidence for or against the existence of the Grey Friars of Castle Street.

Sources:

John Doran, *History of Reading* (1835) pages 111-112

John Leland, *The Itinerary of John Leland the Antiquary* (Volume 2)

John Man, *History of Reading* (1816) pages 294-296

Rev Dr Thomas Tanner, *Notitia Monastica* (1744) p23

Will of John Stanshawe (1516) The National Archives Prerogative Court of Canterbury Wills PROB 11/17

Malcolm Summers (malsummers@aol.com)

SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR 2021

We are pleased to inform you that we have been able to maintain our subscription for the new year at the current year's rate of £9 per person.

Many thanks to those who have already paid their subscriptions for 2021. We are taking new and renewing subscriptions for 2021, preferably by standing order or bank transfer or, by post (cheque only) to our Treasurer. Please contact Secretary at vickichesterman@yahoo.co.uk for bank details.

As we will be continuing our meetings on Zoom until it becomes safe for us to resume physical meetings, can we please remind you that only those who have paid for 2021 membership, will be able to access the 2021 programme of meetings on Zoom. Therefore, early payment by 14th January, will ensure your entitlement to attend the new year's meetings.

WEBSITE NEWS

Over the coming weeks you will notice some changes to our website. I will be busy uploading previous newsletters dating back several years, meeting reports from the past three or so years, and the latest programme leaflet including the membership form. These will all be easy to find from the main menu on the home page.

If you have a moment or two, do have a look.

Vicki Chesterman

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. Nearly all the material above has come from the committee but it would be good to see some contributions from the rest of the membership!