

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

Chairman	Hon Secretary	Hon Treasurer/ Membership	Editor/ Vice Chairman
David Cliffe 1 Priest Hill Caversham READING RG4 7RZ 0118 948 3354	Vicki Chesterman 7 Norman Road Caversham READING RG4 5JN Tel: 0777 634 0923	Malcolm Summers 1 Downs Way Tilehurst READING RG31 6SL Tel: 0788 302 5606 malsummers@aol.com	John Dearing 27 Sherman Road READING RG1 2PJ Tel: 0118 958 0377 john@jbdearing.co.uk

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THOUGHTS FROM THE CHAIR

As many members will know, our May meeting took place in part only. An administrative break-down on the part of the Abbey Baptist Church meant that on that evening, no-one was available to open up the building. The Church was, of course, very apologetic, and it's never likely to happen again. For some of us there was a desperate half-hour of phone calls and chasing round to see if a local hotel or restaurant could take us. Meanwhile, the promised sale of second-hand books took place *al fresco*. The dancing of a few thousand mayflies provided additional entertainment, but in the end, we abandoned the talk part of the meeting. Paul Joyce has promised to give us the story of the printing industry in Reading next April.

There was also a change of plan when it came to the visits, in June and July. The visit to the old Reading Cemetery went ahead as planned, and was well attended and greatly enjoyed. The visit to the nearby Wycliffe Baptist Church could not go ahead, and instead, Caroline Piller led a tour of the statues and sculpture in the town centre, also well attended and enjoyed.

When it came to the Berkshire Heritage Online Fair in August, none of the three of us in the History of Reading Society's "room" knew quite what we were in for. It was held on a Saturday, with two sessions, each of two hours. There were a few technical glitches, and for the first half hour, no-one "visited" at all, but then things started to happen. The advantage of having three of us, each with a collection of books to hand, was that we could help with most enquiries, and sometimes we could refer people to the "rooms" of other organisations. It was also gratifying to hear from people from different parts of the country – and different parts of the world.

Our autumn series of talks started in September, when John Dearing told us about S. S. Stallwood, the local architect, whose many achievements included Queen Victoria Street. It was good to see so many people there, after the summer break.

The programme of talks for 2023 is now almost ready for distribution, and it looks as interesting and varied as ever. All of the talks are about Reading, which is perhaps unusual. Many local history societies intersperse the talks about their immediate area with more general talks covering the country. Reading is old enough, large enough and busy

enough for nine different talks a year – for a subscription of just £9! Some of our speakers are well known, but others I have yet to meet. Some have university connections, some are keen amateur historians, and yet others can speak from their own experience about the times they have lived through. We are indeed fortunate.

At committee meetings, there are plenty of ideas as to visits we might organise, new books we might publish, and old books we might re-publish. The book on Reading pubs and breweries has sold well, and we are determined to put the extra income to good use, for the benefit of members, and Reading local history in general.

David Cliffe,
Chairman, HoRS.

IN CASE YOU MISSED THEM

Reports follow by members of the committee of the in-person and on-line talks given to the Society from February to April 2022. Unfortunately, our May talk did not happen as we were unable to get into the Abbey Baptist Church but happily the speaker has been rebooked for 2023.

A Tale of Two Windows

At the February 2022 talk John Missenden, who is closely associated with conservation in the Reading area, spoke on the architecture of the town's historic buildings, which number over 800 and put Reading in the top eight per cent of English towns. Most of these buildings are of Georgian origin, dominated by two architectural schools - Baroque and Palladian.



Basildon Park – photo by John Dearing

The speaker began by explaining the talk's title, drawn from the window styles inspired by two European monarchs, William of Orange, who inspired the 'Amsterdam', a sliding sash window, seen in London Street and Southampton Street, and Louis XIV, who built Versailles and inspired the more flamboyant Baroque casement window.

John then took us through examples of the key architectural styles found around Reading, giving us details of architectural elements and stories about the buildings. Moving around the town's environs, John's examples ranged from the grandeur of Basildon Park and Prospect Park, built in the Palladian style, through the classical two-tone red and grey brickwork found in many central streets, notably Castle Street and Church Street. Then on to the sweeping terraces of Castle Hill and London Street ending with later designs along the more out of town areas of Oxford Road and Eldon Square.

Jo Alexander-Jones

The Royal Berkshire Hospital

At the March meeting, which was also the Society's AGM, Lionel Williams gave a detailed and entertaining overview of hospital services in Reading. Lionel came to Reading as Chief Medical Photographer at the Royal Berkshire Hospital (referred to as RBH) and is now secretary of the Berkshire Medical Heritage Centre. Medical services began with the foundation of the abbey in 1121 and the abbey's infirmary probably came into its own during the Black Death of 1348.



The Hospital's Coat of Arms

Thereafter hospitals were almost unknown outside London but Voluntary Hospitals funded by public subscription began in the 18th century and Oxford's Radcliffe Infirmary (1770) was one fruit of this. In Reading, a first step in improvement in the town's health came with the founding of the Reading Dispensary in 1802, serving the 'poorer classes of society.' Then in 1836 Lord Sidmouth gave land for the construction of a hospital. The foundation stone was laid in the following year, and in 1839 the RBH opened its doors with 50 beds, having cost £9,000.

The new hospital's early record was not very encouraging, as 50% of patients died during their operations. This percentage happily decreased with the introduction of anaesthetics in the late 1840s. In the course of the 19th century the hospital expanded with the addition of two wings and the facilities were also enhanced by the addition of a library and chapel. Compared with 18 operations in 1844, by 1882 the number had increased to 92. A further advance was the acquisition of x-ray equipment in 1899. In 1941, a little after its 100th birthday, the RBH had 413 beds and a mortality rate of only 1.4%.

Mr Williams also referred to other hospital developments within Reading, notably the Battle Hospital (formerly the Union Workhouse), Prospect Park Hospital and Blagrove Hospital, Tilehurst.

Expansion continued during the 20th century until in 2005 with the closure of Battle and its replacement by the Battle Block at RBH, most in-patient healthcare in Reading is now on the Royal Berks site, which extends a quarter of a mile from north to south. Recently, however, the future of the site has been called into question.

Finally, we were treated to two fascinating videos, the first relating the adventures of the hospital's first clock which was stolen but later turned up at an auction house, after a replica had been made by Caversham clockmaker, David Card. The other, entitled 'The Battle to Beat Polio' included fascinating sequences of the Iron Lung, donated by Lord Nuffield, in use, and song-writer Michael Flanders receiving treatment.

John Dearing

Henry I and his Abbey

At our April 2022 meeting Lindsay Mullaney posed the question, Why Reading, but more importantly, why Henry? Henry was the 9th child (and 4th son) of William the Conqueror but was the only one born 'in the purple', that is after his father had gained the English throne. Henry was knighted by his father in 1086. His elder brother, Richard, died in the New Forest and another brother, William jr, gained the crown, but he too died in the New Forest following an accident. Henry then acceded to the throne.

Henry was tutored by Saint Osmund, the Bishop of Sarum, the diocese of which covered nearby Sonning. The Bishop's Palace at Sonning dates back to the 12th century, so it is possible that Henry may have visited there with his tutor.

The Anglo-Saxon name for Reading – Readingum – indicates it may have been two



Abbey Ruins in 2019 – photo by John Dearing

settlements as the suffix 'gum' denotes a plural. Reading belonged to the King as the Domesday books states '128 hides in Reading over which the King has Lordship'. Through various records we know that Henry was in Reading in 1102, 1108, 1110, 1111 and 1113. Why was founding an abbey so important? Cluniac are a subdivision of the Benedictines and are named after the town of Cluny. Their speciality is prayers for the dead and the care of pilgrims. Cluniac monasteries were not called abbeys, but priories under the leadership of a prior who was directly lead from Cluny (but they are now known as abbeys). The creation of an abbey could only occur in times of peace to allow for the planning and building to take place. Henry's father, William, had founded two abbeys in Caen in France, as well as Battle Abbey in Sussex.

Henry came to the throne in 1100, but at that time England was under threat from his older brother, Robert, Duke of Normandy. Henry married Edith (daughter of Malcolm of Scotland and granddaughter of Ethelred the Unready), who took the name Matilda, but she died in 1118.

In November 1120, the Barons of Sussex were notified that Battle Abbey was to receive the manor of Appledram 'in exchange for Reading'. Later that month the White Ship disaster occurred which was thought to be the catalyst for Henry's founding of Reading Abbey, but none of his contemporaries say this is so.

The following January, Henry married Adeliza of Louvain, and on 18th June that year he lays the foundation for Reading Priory. The first Prior, Peter, came from Cluny with 7 monks, and stayed for 2 years before returning to Cluny. In 1123, Reading became an independent abbey, with the first abbot being Hugh of Amiens. The abbey was consecrated in 1164 by Thomas Becket.

Vicki Chesterman

Our June and July "field trips" comprised a tour of the old Reading Cemetery led by Liz Tait and a walk looking at Reading's statues and monuments led by Caroline Piller. Some photos taken by Malcolm Summers follow. As can be seen the weather in June was somewhat more clement than in July!



June



July

SPENCER SLINGSBY STALLWOOD – Centenary reflections

In September, the Editor gave an account of the life and work of Reading-based architect, Spencer Slingsby Stallwood, the centenary of whose death occurred this year. This article is based on that presentation with original photos taken by the speaker. However, as a general rule the Committee has decided to suspend the reports on meetings till next year's AGM and take soundings then of the views of the membership.

Born in Marlow in 1844, Stallwood worked for architectural firms in his home town, and in Salisbury and Scarborough, before setting up his own practice in Folkestone. There his most interesting work comprised the interior re-ordering of St Peter's Church, together with adjacent Vicarage and School.



St Peter's School

In 1875 Stallwood, by now married with four children, returned to the Thames Valley to Reading, where initially he entered into partnership with the established local architect, Joseph Morris, about whom the speaker had addressed the Society back in 1996. Among the buildings by the partnership in which Stallwood is thought to have had a hand is the magnificent mansion in the Queen Anne style built for William Isaac Palmer, known as Hillside in Allcroft Road. In 1893, Hillside was acquired by Leonard Sutton with Stallwood employed to design an extension. The building is now used for university accommodation.

The partnership with Morris ended in 1886 after the senior partner had joined the strange apocalyptic sect known as the Agapemonites. Stallwood by contrast was a devoted high churchman who served as Churchwarden of St Giles-in-Reading for 25 years and designed a number of additional furnishings for that church.



Stallwood by now had a sufficient reputation to found his own practice and continued to design many buildings in and around Reading till his death in 1922. These included the buildings in Queen Victoria Street that are currently the subject of an exciting restoration and development plan by Thackeray Estates.

Hillside

Queen Victoria Street



These also exemplify the Queen Anne style, of which Stallwood can be seen perhaps as the foremost practitioner in Reading. It is defined by the late Mark Girouard as 'comparatively little to do with Queen Anne. It was the nickname applied to a style which became enormously popular in the 1870s and survived into the early years of this century. 'Queen Anne' came with red brick and white-painted sash windows, with curly pedimented gables and delicate brick panels of sunflowers, swags, or cherubs, with small window panes, steep roofs, and curving bay windows, with wooden balconies and little fancy oriels jutting out where one would least expect them. It was a kind of architectural cocktail, with a little genuine Queen Anne in it, a little Dutch, a little Flemish, a squeeze of Robert Adam, a generous dash of Wren, and a touch of François 1^{er}.'

Stallwood was appointed Oxford Diocesan Surveyor in 1998 and much of his ecclesiastical work comprised restoration of and extensions to existing buildings but there is a very attractive village church designed by him just outside Reading at Spencers Wood.

In summary, Stallwood was an important local architect who has left a legacy of interesting buildings both in the Reading area and in the Folkestone area of Kent. He was perhaps an imitator rather than an innovator but even so to look for the first time at some of his work, for instance Hillside and the Redlands Board School, can be a breath-taking experience. Aside from his professional life and his churchwarden's duties, he was also an active freemason, an honorary curator of the Silchester finds at Reading Museum and according to his obituary 'in early life... a good sportsman and a crack shot.'



St Michael's, Spencers Wood

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John Dearing

Website. We are adding two features to the website – so please check them out. One is a comprehensive list of books about various aspects of Reading's history – it runs to multiple pages but please let us know if we've left anything out! The other is an e-book free to download based on the series of articles that appeared in the Newsletter on Reading's political history, entitled **Swinging Reading**.

NO. 40, BRIDGE STREET



This photograph was taken in the 1950s by Richard Hart, a colleague of mine when I came to work for Reading Public Libraries ten years later. Sadly, he died young, and his photographs were given to the library. I first came across them in the 1990s, when I came to catalogue them.

I looked at the photograph again in 2020, when looking for photographs suitable to illustrate the Society's book, *Abbot Cook to Zero Degrees: an A to Z of Reading's Pubs and Breweries*. I wanted pictures that hadn't been published before, and here was the only picture I knew of to show the Jack of Newbury at No. 42, and The Plasterers Arms at No. 36. (There was, of course, another Plasterers Arms in the Newtown area.) The "Jack" was the white-painted building nearest the camera, and the "Plasterers" was the building with the mansard roof. The picture found its way onto page 120 of the book.

The next time it came to mind was in August 2022, when, together with Caroline Piller and John Dearing, I took part in the Berkshire Heritage Online Fair on behalf of the Society. "On the Zoom platform," as they say, people could contact us, from anywhere in the world, to ask questions about local and family history. There were, of course, many other local societies and institutions taking part.

An enquirer from Cornwall had been trying for years to find a photograph of the house on Bridge Street where her grandfather had lived, and where her father had been born in 1921. She had been told about the house and the area but wasn't sure of the number. She had been driven past it as a child but had never seen a photograph. I was interested in what she had to say and thought it might be good to share it here.

Her grandfather, Thomas Ernest Taylor, had been a motorman for Reading Corporation Tramways at the time of the First World War, and had been employed to teach women how to drive the cars. He appears in the old street directories at No. 40 Bridge Street.

She went on to describe the house, as it must have been described to her. It had iron railings in front, and if you peer at the photo, you can see a low wall in front of No. 40, which before the Second World War would have been surmounted by these railings.

The house went a long way back from the street and was divided into two. The Taylors had the front of the house, and used the front door, but the back of the house was occupied by two women, probably sisters, who used the back door. When the Taylors wanted to hang out their washing, they had to go out of the front door, and walk down

the passage by the side of the house to get to the yard. In due season, they gave lodging to itinerant French onion sellers, when they were in town.

The buildings in the picture were on an island, between the River Kennet and St. Giles's mill stream, which the enquirer referred to as "the channel." It had a grid across it to catch any floating debris. When the river was high, the coal cellar flooded. Since there was no light down there, people sometimes had a nasty shock if they didn't realise the water level had come up.

The Jack of Newbury had closed around 1909, and by the 1920s was occupied by a builder, E. T. Talmage, who had a yard and stables at the back. The Plasterers Arms beerhouse was still going in 1920, and the small building beyond that was occupied by Frederick Andrews, a coal merchant. His yard was adjacent on the Central Wharf, by the river. Our enquirer had also been told of a timber yard on another wharf nearby – which was probably the yard of Baynes and Sherborne, on the other side of Bridge Street. Naughty boys would occasionally roll tree-trunks into the water and try to balance on them as they floated.

A look at the old insurance plan of Reading, published by Charles E. Goad, showed that immediately behind these buildings was a yard belonging to H. and G. Simonds, the brewers. Our enquirer had said that her father had met with an accident whilst playing there. The workmen had been marking wooden casks, using hot branding-irons!

Behind the yard were other buildings, notably the Reading isolation hospital. By the 1980s, when I was living nearby, the buildings on the island had gone, to make way for the Inner Distribution Road. It was a place with a few trees where I could sit down near County Lock on a fine day and read the paper.

So, by dint of looking through old directories and maps in the Central Library, I was able to confirm that the house in question was indeed No. 40, and to send the enquirer the picture, and give her the names of the timber merchant and the coal merchant she had mentioned. Shortly afterwards I received a reply to say that she had "wept with excitement" on seeing the picture, so I had made her day – and she had made mine!

David Cliffe.

Can we help you? The committee frequently receives queries from members of the public on aspects of Reading's history, which we try to answer. It maybe also that our members have similar questions – if so, please remember we are here to help you – if we can!

JOSEPH HUNTLEY – BLUE PLAQUE

It was Joseph Huntley who started a bakery and confectionery shop in 1822, in London Street. With his son, Thomas, he established Huntley's Biscuits. He later joined with members of the Palmer family, establishing the world-famous biscuit factory on Kings Road in Reading. This year we have been celebrating the 200-year anniversary of the beginnings of this biscuit production empire in our town.

From 1837 to 1842 Joseph Huntley lived on Christchurch Road with his family, who helped out in his shop. At that time his home was at 9 Whitley Crescent, which these days, is 21 Christchurch Road.

The current owner of the house worked with local historians Dennis Woods and Evelyn Williams, to research the history of her house and came up with the great idea of putting up a blue plaque on the front wall. Surprisingly, given the impact of Huntley and Palmers on Reading, this will be the first plaque to commemorate Joseph Huntley's memory.

The house owner then enlisted the help of Reading Civic Society, to gain a Grade II listing of the house, which led eventually to the permission being granted to put up a blue plaque.



Photo by Jo Alexander-Jones

It was unveiled on 10th September 2022 in front of a large gathering of local people, including the proud owner of 21 Christchurch Road. Rachel Eden, the mayor of Reading was booked to perform the unveiling. Unfortunately, because of the death of the late Queen, she was prevented from carrying out official duties. So, at the last

minute, Richard Bennett, from the Reading Civic Society, stepped in, to do the honours.

Afterwards the gathering was invited into Christ Church opposite, where the house owner described her historic journey. This was followed by a talk from Dennis Woods and Evelyn Williams, who gave a presentation on the history of Joseph Huntley and 21 Christchurch Road. The parishioners kindly provided tea and cake to mark the occasion.

Caroline Piller

[Ed. Coincidentally the Newsletter 20 years ago contained an article by the Editor about Christ Church, Reading, and the architect, Henry Woodyer.]

PHOTOS OF EARLEY

Around 2000, a group of people got together and researched the area of Earley and produced two books: *Earley Days: An illustrated account of our community's development* and *Earley Memories: A century of change*.

Both books were very well received and covered the area from Loddon Bridge across Woodley and Lower Earley, down to Cemetery Junction in Reading.

Recently, a new group was formed, with additional residents and they are working on a project to collect as many photographs of Earley (old and new), as they can find, to publish in a new book. Their aim is to gather together images which may have become lost or are hidden and have not been shared.

If any members have some images, they think may be suitable, please contact Trevor Smith on trevorsmithg8@gmail.com, who will be able to give you some more information.



Sir Thomas Noon Talfourd (1795–1854)
A brief summary of his life and a closer look at the claim that he was the original for Dickens's character Tommy Traddles

Thomas Noon Talfourd, a native of Reading, started out from fairly humble beginnings to become among the better-known names in England by the mid-19th century, and arguably the most famous Reading man of his times. He is notable for having achieved prominence in several fields. Perhaps foremost, he was an orator. He kept audiences entranced with the richness and depth

of the imagery and language of his speech, whether in the Law Court, the House of Commons, or elsewhere. On one occasion in Court, for example, he spoke for three and a half hours and was listened to with breathless attention throughout, which gave way to great cheers and applause at the end – until the judge reminded everyone that such behaviour was not appropriate in those surroundings.¹

He was a successful writer. He produced around fifty articles for national magazines before he was twenty-five years old. He was not yet twenty when he wrote *An Attempt to Estimate the Poetical Talent of the Present Age, including a Sketch of the History of Poetry, and Characters of Southey, Crabbe, Scott, Moore, Lord Byron, Campbell, Lamb, Coleridge and Wordsworth*, an astonishing and seminal work, especially for its identification of Wordsworth as foremost poet of the age at a time when he was mostly ignored.

He was a poet, publishing his first volume of poetry when he was still at school, and continuing to write sonnets, his preferred poetic form, throughout his life. And he was a dramatist, gaining great acclaim for his plays – especially *Ion* – although none have stood the test of time.

He was a success as a politician, serving as Member of Parliament for Reading, being elected three times and winning whenever he stood. His Custody of Infants Act was a major step forward in women's rights. He was instrumental in bringing in a new copyright law. Several of his Parliamentary speeches were printed.

He was much sought after in his professional career in the Law, becoming first Serjeant-at-Law and then a judge. He was knighted by Queen Victoria.

He was a close friend of Charles and Mary Lamb, Charles Dickens, John Forster, William Wordsworth, William Makepeace Thackeray, William Macready, Charles Kemble, Daniel Maclise, Leigh Hunt, Robert Browning and very many more in the literary, theatrical, and artistic scenes. Charles Lamb appointed him his literary executor, and Talfourd produced four volumes of edited letters and biography that have been read ever since.

After his death many of these things were mentioned as credits to his name, but first and foremost people noted his character, particularly his unassuming kindness, generosity and integrity.

Talfourd was a family man. The eldest of ten children himself, he and his wife Rachael had eight children, five of whom lived to be adults, and they adopted a niece. He was a man of faith, first by upbringing within the nonconformist church, then becoming a Unitarian, and finally finding his home in the Church of England. His profession caused him to be a frequent traveller within England and Wales, but he only ventured abroad once in his first 45 years. He then achieved unlikely success as a travel writer.

His death was, sadly, memorable. He was in Crown Court in Stafford, addressing the grand jury, when he was suddenly taken ill and died. The theme of his last speech was typical of the man, a call for more sympathy between classes. The beliefs and attitudes of many figures from the past do not bear scrutiny when compared with modern morality, but with Talfourd there are no such conflicts. He abhorred slavery, treated all as equals, and believed in improving the lot of those less fortunate than himself.

I have been working on a biography of this famous Reading man for over two years now and expect to have finished by the autumn of next year. When I started, I knew very little about him – really nothing beyond the summary statements found in most references to him, that he was:

- born in Reading
- the son of a brewer
- the author of a play called *Ion*

- said to be the original for the Dickens character Traddles from *David Copperfield*.

Having looked into his life in detail, I can agree with the first and third statements (although not all authorities claim Reading as his home it is clearly provable to have been so). The second is a partial truth. When Talfourd was born, his father Edward was a linen draper. Edward became a brewer when Talfourd was a young boy of about 6 or 7 years. Edward then moved to a third career of lunatic asylum keeper when Talfourd was about 18 or 19. Talfourd was therefore the son of a linen draper, turned brewer, turned asylum keeper – and of those trades Edward was brewer for the fewest number of years.

But what of the last statement?

Was Thomas Noon Talfourd the original for Charles Dickens's character Tommy Traddles?

After Charles Dickens's death in June 1870 a popular pastime grew with the passing years of attempting to identify who was the original of various characters in Dickens's novels. Prior to this, during Dickens's lifetime, some had been identified and spoken of, by others and by Dickens himself. For example, as *Bleak House* was being serialised in May 1853, an article on Literary Men in London that was much copied by many newspapers, stated:

*Dear, kind, old Leigh Hunt, toddling over the pavement in the Strand, towards his son's newspaper office, is a common occurrence. Is he the Skimpole of Bleak House? The knowing ones of London say he is.*²

This identification was indeed correct, as Dickens himself corroborated it in a letter of September 1853.³ By 1857 the list of identified originals for characters in Dickens's novels had risen in number. An article in the *Dublin Evening Mail*⁴ identified the following:

Leigh Hunt as Harold Skimpole in *Bleak House*; and Thomas Chapman, the London merchant, stiff-necked Dombey; and S. C. Hall (editor of the Art Journal, and husband of Irish Mrs. Hall) as the renowned Pecksniff, in *Martin Chuzzlewit*; Merdle, the millionaire, in *Little Dorrit*, being an adumbration of John Sadleir, the suicide.

It is interesting that, although *David Copperfield* had been published in 1849–50, the supposed portrayal of Talfourd as Tommy Traddles had escaped the notice of everyone until October 1870, twenty years after publication. In a *Life of Charles Dickens*, published at that date, Dr Robert Shelton Mackenzie identified a whole host of pairings of characters and their supposed originals, indeed a whole chapter of them. Within that chapter he wrote:

In *David Copperfield*, the hero's youthful friend, who finally is spoken of as the next judge, is supposed to have been intended for the late Sir T.N. Talfourd, the author's oldest and truest friend. The sketch is scarcely complimentary.⁵

From this it seems that Dr Mackenzie was rather tentative in his identification, especially as most of the other entries in his book ran to at least a long paragraph, and often to several pages. These 39 words represent the briefest of mentions.

Initially Mackenzie's identification of Talfourd as the original for Traddles was met with universal scepticism. A good example of this was in the magazine *Every Saturday* in the following February:

Since the death of Dickens many curious explorers have been industriously at work to discover the originals of his most popular characters.... In looking over the long list, with its unsuggestive array of meaningless names, we have been specially struck by the statement that Talfourd was meant when Dickens delineated Traddles, in the novel of David Copperfield... what possible basis in the habits and character of Talfourd can be adduced to identify him with Traddles? At the time David Copperfield meets Traddles, the latter is a briefless lawyer.⁶ Now we know perfectly well what were the occupations of Talfourd when he was in that unfortunate condition. He was the keenest interpretative critic of the great English writers of the century - especially of Wordsworth, then contemned as a poet both by

*Whigs and Tories. There is not the slightest trace of Traddles in Talfourd, as far as we know Talfourd through his early writings.*⁷

In 1872, John Forster brought out his six volume *Life of Charles Dickens*. Forster had been a close friend of Dickens, and a friend of both Talfourd and Leigh Hunt. He did not spare Leigh Hunt, mentioning his identification with Skimpole, but he made no mention of any link between Talfourd and Traddles.

Just over twenty years later, in the introduction to *David Copperfield* in volume XIV of *The Writings of Charles Dickens*, the essayist and critic Edwin Percy Whipple wrote:

*Among the characters in David Copperfield drawn from life, it has been supposed that Dickens's dear friend, Talfourd, stood for the portrait of Traddles. There may have been some external peculiarities in which they agreed, but there is no resemblance in the minds of the two. Traddles is represented as saying that he was entirely destitute of imagination; And Talfourd, who wrote so much on the subject of imagination, and who exercised the faculty so often in speech as well as writing, could never have said that. As a scholar, critic, and poet, as a lawyer, legislator, and judge, he appears to have had nothing in common with Traddles except goodness of heart.*⁸

Whipple might have added that Traddles describes himself as not only without imagination, but also as supposing that there was 'never a young man as destitute of originality as' he. If Dickens had Talfourd in mind, he seems to be out to wound him deeply! Talfourd, author, poet and playwright, could never be thought to lack either imagination or originality.

J. W. T. Ley, in *The Dickens Circle* (1918), adds to the similarities he can see, but was still far from being convinced by the identification:

*It is sometimes said that Talfourd was the original of Tommy Traddles. I can find no proof of this, but there is just enough internal evidence to justify suspicion, so to speak. As Percy Fitzgerald says, "he may have offered suggestions for the character." Traddles's lovable ways and qualities of friendship may well have been taken from Talfourd. It is certainly conceivable that the latter's elevation to the bench just when the last numbers of Copperfield were being written suggested Traddles's destiny to Dickens. For though he has not yet donned the ermine when the book closes, we know he did so ultimately.*⁹

However, from time to time the uncertainties and qualifications gave way to seemingly plain statements of incontrovertible fact. 'Traddles's original was Justice Talfourd, for whom Dickens had the greatest affection', states the entry on Traddles in the 1924 publication *The Dickens Encyclopaedia*.¹⁰ As we come nearer to the current day, such assertions occur more frequently. For example:

*[Dickens] formed the adorable character of the well-meaning lawyer Tommy Traddles and his pious wife in David Copperfield upon Talfourd and his dissenting wife Rachel.*¹¹

It is possible, but perhaps not profitable, to multiply such quotes. In summary, the possibility that Talfourd was the original of Tommy Traddles was not something thought of in the lifetimes of either Talfourd or Dickens, but came along much later, perhaps when Talfourd was less well-known. The only arguments in favour of the identification are that Traddles had a good heart, was a staunch friend, was in the law, with initials TT and first name Thomas (assuming Tommy to have been a contraction). Against the identification are all the other circumstances of Traddles's life, his unhappy childhood being brought up by an uncle, his education, his lack of imagination or originality, that he was no orator, member of high society or an MP, that Traddles was short of money but that Talfourd was not. Traddles has no interest in drama; the stage was almost Talfourd's *raison d'être*. I could go on... and the list would be long. In all, Traddles bears a small passing resemblance to Talfourd but not enough for belief in the statement that Talfourd was his original.

Although unlikely to make any difference to the frequency with which the identification is made, as you can see, I come down firmly on the side of there being insufficient evidence for the identification between the two. I am, in fact, a reluctant convert to this view, as I wanted to believe it to be so!

It is true therefore to write that 'it is said by some that Talfourd was the original for Traddles', but to it should be added, 'but there is little compelling evidence for the statement'.

Malcolm Summers

[Ed] For the record, in an article on Talfourd in the **HoRS Newsletter No. 42 for Spring 2016**, the Editor wrote: 'Talfourd was... friend of Dickens and the alleged model for his character, Thomas Traddles.' He is grateful to Malcolm for setting the record straight – and glad that the word 'alleged' was used!! We will learn more about Talfourd when Malcolm addresses the Society on the subject on 18th October 2023 – book the date!

Notes to article on Thomas Talfourd

¹ Grant 1837 v2 p159–167

² *Dublin Weekly News* 2 July 1853 p11 c4

³ Quoted in Wikipedia article on Leigh Hunt

⁴ *Dublin Evening Mail* 22 July 1857 p3 c6

⁵ *The British Controversialist and Literary Magazine* 1870 p319–20

⁶ Actually, they meet at school

⁷ *Every Saturday* 4 February 1871 p114

⁸ *The Writings of Charles Dickens*, volume XIV (Houghton, Mifflin & Co, Boston and New York 1894) p xvii

⁹ *The Dickens Circle*, by J. W. T. Ley (Chapman & Hall, London 1918) p44–5

¹⁰ Arthur L. Hayward, *The Dickens Encyclopaedia* (Routledge & Sons, 1924)

¹¹ *Greek and Roman Classics in the Struggle for Reform* Edited by Henry Stead and Edith Hall (Bloomsbury, 2015) p106

A NOTE FROM THE TREASURER

2023 Subscriptions are due from 1 January. Membership remains at £9 for the year. Since our December to February meetings will be on Zoom, and only available to members, please note that if you wish to join those meetings you will need to have paid your subscription by then. Members who have set up annual bank transfers may need to move the payment date to early January.

You can pay by:

- bank transfer - our bank details are unaltered from last year, but please email historyofreadingsociety@yahoo.com if you need to know them. Please always put your name as reference for the payment.
- cheque - by post to me (my address is at the top of this Newsletter).
- cash - if at an 'in-person' meeting of the Society.

Because of bank fees on cheques and cash, bank transfer is the best method, where possible.

I am aware that it used to be the case that payments before the new year were not desired, but that is not the case now. Please pay as soon as you wish!

One last thing, please make sure that you complete an Application Form to Join or Renew, as this keeps the permission to hold your details and contact you in your preferred way(s) up to date, according to 'GDPR' (General Data Protection Regulation) rules. The completed form can be scanned or photographed and emailed to me, or posted, or handed to me at an 'in-person' meeting. If you need a copy of the form (which is with the Programme), please email historyofreadingsociety@yahoo.com

Thank you.

Malcolm Summers