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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SUMMER 1995

HEADMASTER'S LODGE
CRAVEN ROAD

About 1840 a house was built for William Silver Darter in Kings Road of Bath stone brought to Reading by barge along the Kennet and Avon canal. The house was designed by Henry Briant who also designed the first buildings of the Royal Berkshire Hospital which opened in 1839.

W. S. Darter was eventually chief constable, town councillor and alderman for 45 years He was *mayor* in 1850 and '52, and was the author of "Reading 70 Years Ago", published in 1887. He named his new house "Swiss Villa". Seven years later it was bought by George Palmer, carefully taken down piece by piece and rebuilt at about the centre of Craven Road on the east side. At one time it was occupied by Mr.O. Taylor, manager of Reading Gas Company.

I first knew the house in 1922 when I started attending Reading School. The house had been bought in 1919 for the use of the schools headmaster and was then renamed "Headmaster's Lodge• having previously been known as "Cravenhurst". The first headmaster to occupy the house was Mr George Keeton, "Jinks" as he was known to the pupils; he had been an assistant master at the school from 1901 and was invited back in 1916 to organise the amalgamation of Reading School with Kendrick Boys School from Queen's Road. He lived in the South House of the school and was both headmaster and a housemaster. Feeling

that he could not do justice to both posts he told the governors he would look for an alternative house near the school. This house in Craven Road becoming available filled the post ideally as its garden stretched down to the boundary wall of the school. A door was built into the wall so he could walk directly from his home into the school grounds.

The house, still named Headmasters Lodge, has a three-gabled frontage and is the only one of Bath stone in the road. It stands there with a justifiable aura of solid Victorian dignity surrounding it.

Norman Wicks

MEETING DATES 1995/96

21 **September 1995**
Speaker **and subject to be advised**

19 October 1995
PC Chris Bergmann
Policing in Reading

16 November 1995
Dr Gillian Clarke
The Foundling Hospital

14 Decembar 1995
Speaker and subject to be advised

18 January 1996
Annual Party

15 February 1996
Barbara Aldridge
Whitchurch in Wartime

14 March 1996
Annual General Meeting
Speaker to be advised

18 April 1996
Katie Willis
The Berkshire Record Office

16 May 1996
Elspet Naish
Mary Mitford

SUMMER VISITS

Silchester (Calleva)

Saturday 17 June 1995. A guided walk led by Dr Stephen Rippon (Reading University Department of Archaeology).

Open to members and guests - free to members, £1.00 per guest. Some walking will be involved - please come prepared.

Meet by 2.00 PM in Silchester Church car park. Reading Bus 143 from Reading Station to Tadley runs hourly to stop nearby.

Further details available from Bent Weber on Reading (01734) 265200. If you are able to assist in providing transport or would like transport, please phone.

Tour of Reading & up to Southcote by Narrow Boat

The proposed narrow boat trip planned for 13 July has unfortunately been cancelled due to insufficient support.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

If you find a red star In the box below, then your subscription for 1995, which became due on 1st. January, Is still unpaid. If you would like to renew your subscription the Hon. Treasurer would be pleased to hear from you. The rates are £7.50 for a single member (£5.00 If retired or a student), £10.00 for a couple (£7.50 if retired).

Unfortunately we have had to increase the charge to £1.00 for non-members attending our meetings.

WEATHER AND CLIMATE IN HISTORY

Extracts From a Talk to the Society on 16 March 1995 by Dr John Starr

Re-constructing Past Climates

How do we find out about past climates? For the more distant times, records of the tree line, pollen types, animal and bird remains, radio-carbon dating of trees will point to the extent and type of tree cover, of occupation or migration by animals and Man. Cave paintings from the Sahara around 3500 BC Illustrate hippopotamus hunts by canoe. Submerged forests around Britain at about the same period (Borth Bog) tell of different sea levels in the past. while archaeological remains may indicate past sea and lake levels (up to about 3000 BC Lake Chad was 30-40 metres higher than now). Greek and Roman literary sources tell of disease and famine and notable crop failures, while abandoned cities and trade routes, epic Norse voyages, bridges long since bereft of their rivers (Palermo, 1113 AD): all tell directly or indirectly of climate change, indeed even of individual weather catastrophes!

The wind vane has a history stretching back to Antiquity, the Greeks had their Tower of the Winds in Athens, while Torricelli and Galilee in Italy invented the barometer and thermometer, respectively, in the early 17th century. For southern England actual weather records go back some 300 years! Richard Townley produced the first rain gauge in 1676; he had a pipe from his roof-top gauge to his bedroom so that he could measure the rain in comfort! By careful analysis of comparative thermometer records it has been possible to reconstruct a set of mean monthly temperatures for lowland central England from 1659 (accurate to 0.2°c from 1720).

Evidence for Climatic Change over the Past 1000 Years

An indication of the warmer climate of southern England in the late 12th century is to be found in the etchings of grape picking in the Peterborough Psalter (illustrating murals on the Abbey walls); not an area for viticulture now. Similarly the terraced site of mediaeval vineyard in Hereford is now very much a "frost hollow".

Climate began to deteriorate from the 14th century, reaching a nadir - "The Little Ice Age* - in the late 17th century. For this decline there is much evidence. The Black Death (1349) struck a population already weakened by the famine years of 1311 to 1319; by 1327 the population in badly affected areas was already down by 1/3 on numbers in 1300 - and in some areas by 2/3 (such areas would be virtually wiped out by the Black Death). Of nearly 50 "deserted villages" in Oxfordshire in the 14th and 15th centuries only 10% are attributed to the Black Death.

Incidentally, the Black Death followed floods of 1332 in China when an estimated 7 million perished! The destruction of the sanitation system and the dislocation of habitats of plague-carrying rodents led to their migration to ports, and thence to Europe.

The climatic decline between 1440 and 1480 led John Warwick to note in his "History" of 1485 that "58 villages in the Midlands have tumbled in my lifetime". Trevelyan deduced that rivers were deeper and more navigable around the time of the Wars of the Roses (1455-1485) - probably resulting in the flooding of low-lying farms. This also coincided with the return of soldiers from the "Hundred Years War who, faced with starvation, fuelled unrest.

The severe weather of 1564-65 surpassed that of the 1430's, it was to be followed by 1O or more severe years over the next 175 *years.* Thus the Act of Union between England and Scotland (1707) was no doubt encouraged by the famines following a decade of disastrous harvests when "the Scots ate snails in the streets of Aberdeen".

Erratically but gradually the 18th and 19th centuries saw an amelioration in climate, although the Thames froze over in 1716, the 1730's enjoyed several winters as mild, and several summers · as hot, as any in our present century. Perhaps it was the sunshine of that period that led to the planning of the Georgian terraces of Bath up the open hillside, a novel fashion for any English city at that time, and in marked contrast to the sheltered valley sites preferred for 16th century villages. It was the warmth of the 1730's, too, that provided a helpful stimulus to the agricultural improvements of "Turnip" Townsend.

However, the hard winters of the early 19th century clearly left an indelible impression of the young Dickens (of the first nine Christmases of his life, 1810-1819, six were white); hence his legacy of the "traditional English White Christmas" - with stage coaches! Following the eruption of Mt. Tamboro in the East Indies the year 1817 was notorious as "the year without a summer"; famine riots were widespread. (Dust veils from eruptions similarly blighted summers in the 1780's).

On a fashion note….this cold spell of the early 1800's led to the design of warm female undergarments, particularly "the bosom friend", and an end to the daring French fashions, dating from the 1790's which "exposed the person". It was thus "the north wind that enforced a return to modesty in women's dress.

Although the 1840's saw movements towards democracy and universal suffrage, an effect of weather on agriculture played a critical part in the history of an impoverished Ireland - the great potato famine. The summer of 1846 was warm and humid, providing the ideal conditions for potato blight fungus; over six years of continuing outbreaks, aggravated by typhus, over 1 million died, and the flow of emigration began. By the 20th century the Irish population had fallen to one half of the 1845 level.

Weather and Wars

Caesar's well chronicled invasion attempt of 55 BC was thwarted by the north-easterly gales; a year later he landed but his ships were damaged by overnight gales, 10 days of northwesterlies preventing reinforcements from France. He eventually evacuated half the force to France for help, but few returned - and the invasion force ended up rowing home!

The effect of storms in dispersing the Spanish Armada (1588) is well known; the dramatic deterioration of weather after Trafalgar (1805) provided a sterner test of seamanship than even the French and Spanish fleets had provided!

The crucial value of weather information at the D-Day landings points to how the future of Europe relied, for a few days at least on the skill of the meteorologist. Since then every theatre of war has used weather information In strategic and tactical planning. ·

The Climatic Future

Up to the 1800's Man was an innocent onlooker as climate fluctuations affected him. However, gradually from the 1800's, as the pollution of the Industrial Revolution took hold, Man has unwittingly, at first, been a party to changing the atmosphere, perhaps irrevocably. Analysis of weather records since that time has shown a mean global climate warming of about 0.5°C; since the early 1900's all glaciers have been retreating. The warming has been far from uniform; the 1940's and 50's showed a big increase compared with earlier and later decades. Continued anthropogenic inputs of Carbon Dioxide and Oxides of Nitrogen are calculated to produce warming of approximately 1°c in northern Europe by 2030, with associated rainfall increases and sea-level rises. But we have seen that climate has always been changing, has always influenced Man and his way of life, his culture - Man has usually adapted!