

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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Editorial

Dear Members,

Welcome to the first newsletter of 1997.

I have taken over from Bent as editor for the next few editions. It would be very good to have some contributions from the membership generally. Have YOU discovered anything new about Reading's history recently? If so, tell us about it! I found out several interesting things from Miss Bloch-Rive's article on Newtown, which I have printed overpage.

It is a sign of the times that all Societies these days find it difficult to get members to attend meetings, and our Society is no exception. The Committee work hard to publicise the Society and its meetings and to get interesting speakers, but it is also up to the members themselves to recruit and to make us known.

Membership subscriptions are for the calendar year, and for 1997 are £9 single, or £12 for double membership (£6 and £9 for concessions).

The Annual General Meeting is on March 20. The existing committee have worked long and hard and, though willing to stand again, would find it a great encouragement if some new faces joined them.

The meetings for the remainder of this session are April 17 th, and May 15th, as reported below.

I hope to see you at these meetings.

Sincerely

Elspet Naish.

Newtown, Reading.

Precis of a talk given by Miss D. Bloch-Rive in March, 1996.

Newtown is a distinctive area of Reading. It is bounded by the London Road (**A4**) to the South and the River Kennet on the North, and runs from the Huntley and Palmer's factory site in the West to the Reading - Waterloo railway line in the East. It has an interesting history.

The land originally belonged to the Abbey but was seized by the Crown on the Dissolution in 1539. It stayed Crown property until 1832, 1833 when it was auctioned off to speculative builders. A map of 1834 shows that little building had taken place, but by 1841 there were a few modest cottages and six comfortable villas in Wellington Place.

By 1853 the western area between Kennetside and Orts Road had been fully developed , with small brick-built terrace houses with long narrow gardens, and the Dove and Fisherman's Rest pubs were already there. By that time Huntley and Palmers had started operating, although they employed only 41 people.

Other areas to the East were sold at auction in 1861, by the Wheble and Cholmeley estates. The areas were developed differently, one with workers' small terraced houses, and the other with spacious houses fronting King's Road and round Victoria Square. One house was particularly splendid - Cholmeley House - with a wide frontage on London Road and a garden the size of a small park. East of Cholmeley Road was not built on. Probably it was what we would call allotments and a nursery garden.

In the 1870's development started again with the well-known Reading architect Joseph Morris building Newtown School and School Terrace and the terraces along London Road, where the houses were larger than those previously built.

By 1878 Huntley and Palmer had a workforce of 3,000 and Sutton's Seeds were also nearby, so there came to be a demand for housing east of Cholmeley Road. Coventry, Norton, Filey and Radstock Roads were all built. The housing was all terraced, but different grades of workers had homes which reflected their positions in the factory. All this area belonged to the Palmer family, which is reflected in the lack of public houses.

By the time of World War I, Newtown was fully developed, and was a busy close-knit community. A group of residents have produced an excellent book - "Newtown, Reading" ISBN 0 952621606 (£4.99) - for those who would like to read further.

Brief Reports of the 1996 Guided Walks and Visits.

A guided walk and a visit were arranged for the Society last summer - which now, in the depths of wintry January, seems a long time ago.

June saw twenty or so members and guests being taken around the Forbury Park and St. Lawrence's Churchyard by Jocelyn Whitfield to look at the wide variety of trees and shrubs they contain. On a cloudy evening, in the space of two hours, Jocelyn showed us what a wealth of interest there is, in what is an extremely small corner of central Reading, peaceful, yet only a proverbial stone's throw from the cares of everyday bustle and hustle. The sky threatened, but the rain thankfully held off. This meant that we could look up into the trees without being blinded by strong sunlight: truly a silver lining to a cloudy sky!

In July twenty of us drove out to Sulhampstead on a perfect summer evening, to the Police College, to look at the little museum there. The exhibits on show were most interesting, and covered many aspects of police work and also showed how that work has changed over the years. The curator was most informative and obviously as fascinated by the items under her care as we were.

Reports of Meetings.

Saturday, 18th. January.

We were very pleased to welcome Paddy Derry to this meeting, the first we have held on a Saturday afternoon. She gave a very interesting illustrated talk on the **History of Twyford**, which was much appreciated by her audience. We hope to have a summary in a later issue of this newsletter.

Our meeting had a near capacity audience at which we were very

pleased to see several old friends. On a straw poll, about a quarter of the audience said that they were able to come only because the meeting was held in the afternoon. For a variety of reasons, evening meetings are not possible for them. Your committee will undoubtedly bear this in mind when planning next year's programme, perhaps again having the January meeting on a Saturday afternoon. There are, nevertheless, many pro's and con's to consider In this. Please bear with us.

For your diary

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| 20 March | Annual General Meeting, followed by <i>"The Elusive Search - the Bocketts in Berkshire"</i> - Trevor Cotton. |
| 17 April | <i>"17th. Century Dissent in Reading"</i> - Sarah Griffin: |
| 15May | <i>"History of Tailoring in Reading"</i> - Jenny Silverthorne Wright. |
| 19 June | Guided walk along the Kennet by Ken Major. Meet at the Abbey Gateway at 7.30 p.m. |
| 17 July | Twyford Walkabout with Paddy Derry. This follows on from her talk at the January meeting. Meet at the entrance to Twyford station booking office at 7.00pm. |

SATURDAY SCHOOLS run by University of Reading.

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| 22 February | Inn, Tavern and Alehouse: a social history of public houses. |
| 10 May | Ephemera: printed material and the historian. |
| 10 May | The Thames in words and pictures. |

Transport

Your committee is aware that transport difficulties may mean that several members are finding it difficult to come to our meetings. Waiting for the fewer late evening buses on dark cold nights in Broad Street or Friar street to get home does take the shine off any meeting, however good.

Consequently, we should like to help where we can, especially with homeward-bound journeys. If anyone is able to offer lifts for members living in West or South Reading, please would they contact our secretary **Peter Russell**.

Similarly, should anyone like to have a lift - if this can be arranged - please also get in touch with Peter. He hopes to match the supply with the demand.

Please do not hesitate to ask: we should like to see many more of our members at meetings.

Bent Weber.