

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

Hon. Secretary

Mr P Russell
Wilmington Close
Woodley
Reading RG5 4LR

Phone: (0118) 969 6081

Chair

Mr BC Weber

Hon. Treasurer

Mr R Hutchinson
19 Rosehill Park
Caversham
Reading RG4 8XE

Phone: (0118) 947 9379

Editorial

Dear Members

This is the Spring newsletter, but as I write hailstones are driving against the window - so Spring has to be imagined rather than enjoyed. We have come to the end of a most interesting year's programme - Joan Hutchinson is to be congratulated on finding so many good speakers.

There are still the two summer walkabouts to be enjoyed. The first on June 19, is along the Kennett with Ken Major, starting at 7.30 from the Abbey Gateway.

The second on July 17, is a walk around Twyford led by Paddy Derry, when we will be able to see many of the places featured in her January talk. We meet at 7 p.m. at Twyford station.

Anyone who cares to come on either walk will be most welcome. (A charge of £1 is made for non-members.)

In response to my appeal for articles, I'm delighted to print Francis Goodridge's information on West Reading. Has anyone else been doing some research?

Elspet Naish.

Reports of Meetings

The Forbury Hill

At the February meeting Dr. Slade, our president, lectured on "The Forbury Hill". He explained that there was no evidence to support the idea that the Vikings established an encampment on the mound, or that a castle once stood there. After the dissolution of the Abbey, the land known as the Forbury was sold and was in private hands until the last century. The mound gave great pleasure to local people as an area for recreation, and Dr. Slade painted a vivid picture of the activities held there. To this day the gardens around the mound continue to delight.

The Bockett Family

On March 20, after the AGM, Trevor Cotton, who has lived in the area for some time and who is a member of the Purley Local History Group, entertained and intrigued members and their guests with a talk on his researches into the history of the Bockett family.

His interest started when a friend who is a coin collector bought a large book of magnificently accurate and detailed pen and ink drawings of Ancient British coins. The book was published in 1850 and the artist was Harriet Sophia Bockett. Trevor was asked to try to find out as much as possible about this lady and her family, who, it was thought, might have lived in Berkshire.

The results of his investigations were both fascinating and startling:-

The Bocketts were a family with thirteen children who moved from London to Southcote in Reading. They appear to have attended St. Mary's in the Butts church, as five of the daughters were married there.

However Harriet and her unmarried sister Julio eventually moved to a comfortable house in Burghfield. In the church there there is a delightful memorial window dedicated to them and their brother.

The family vault, where their parents were buried is in St. Michael's Tilehurst, and Julia and Harriet are buried there too.

The story develops further, with references to coin collections and coin hoards, to Reading Abbey and Reading School. Much more remains to be discovered, and if any members of the Society are able to supply any more information about the Bocketts, a remarkable Victorian family, or are willing to do some further research, then, Trevor says, posterity could significantly benefit!

Religious Dissent

In April, Sarah Griffin showed us how religious dissent developed in Reading in the seventeenth century, partly as a result of the Civil War. It was an interesting and very wide-ranging topic.

Some West Reading Local History

The area between Tilehurst Road, where the James Butcher flats now stand, and the South side of Argyle Road, was once an estate owned by a non-conformist minister. The estate's gardener lived in a cottage (which still stands) on the north side of Argyle Road. The gardener's daughter, who continued to live there after her father's death, told me she remembered the minister and his wife driving out of the gate opposite every Sunday in a horse and trap, on their way to church.

An acquaintance who knew the area in the 1920's, informed me that the old Oracle gate was situated at that time on the Tilehurst Road and removed during development. The gate, now restored, can be seen in Reading Museum.

The "Rose and Thistle" Public House near the west end of Argyle Road is an old late 18th. Century coaching inn. Some notes on a wall inside comment on the origin of the name - "Rose" being the English emblem, and "Thistle" the Scottish one, also suggesting that the Thistle has a connection with the Scottish name Argyll in Argyle Road. The old stables of the inn with a hay loft can still be seen at the side of the building.

Almost opposite is an old residence with stables in a courtyard at the back - a reminder that horse transport continued to be important well into the present century.

F.P. Goodridge.

The A.G.M. - a brief summary.

As most members will have seen the chairman's report and review for 1996/7. I append only a very short summary.

In common with many societies, membership has declined over the past year, but it has been good to welcome many visitors to our meetings.

Anything members can do to publicise the Society or to encourage new members to join, will be more than welcome! It is obvious that if we reach a point when we cannot pay for the speakers and for the hire of the Abbey Room, then the Society must cease to exist. However, we have not got to that state yet.

Bent Weber agreed to be chairman for one more year. And the committee; Mr. and Mrs. Hutchinson, Mr. and Mrs. Russell, Francis Goodridge and John Dearing, also agreed to continue in office. (Mrs. Hutchinson is the programme secretary. If you know of any suitable interesting speaker, or you have any Reading topic you would like to hear discussed, please let her know.)